UNDINE

Illustrated by
Arthur Rackham

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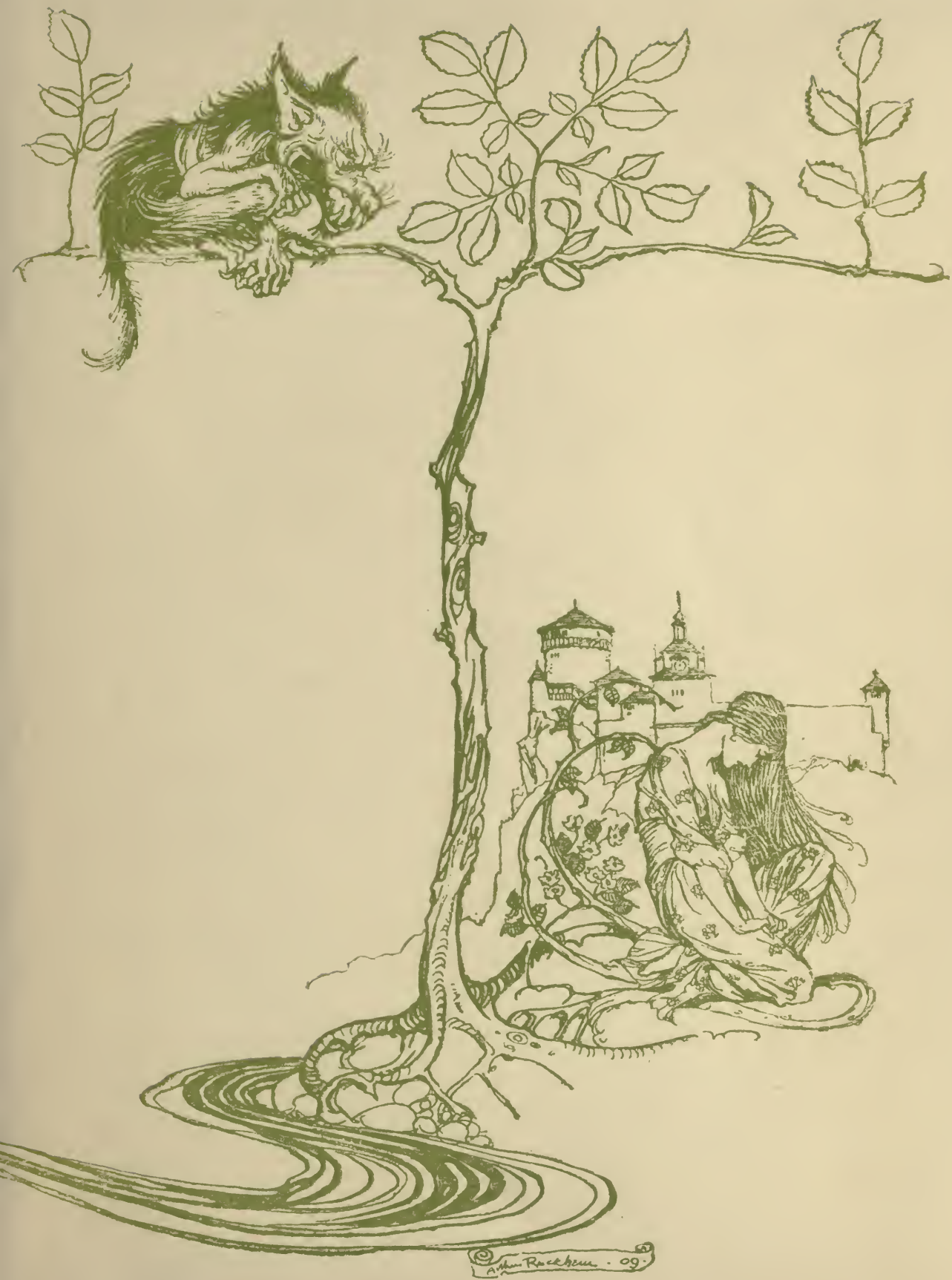
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UNDINE

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Arthur Rackham '09

Undine outside the window

UNDINE

BY·DE·LA·MOTTE·FOUQUÉ
ADAPTED·FROM·THE·GERMAN
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UNDINE

This is the story of the Knight Huldbrand of Ringstetten and of Undine, telling how the Knight wedded with a water-sprite, and what chanced therefrom: and how the Knight died and was buried: and how Undine returned to her element beneath the Mediterranean Sea.

CHAPTER I

HOW THE KNIGHT CAME TO THE FISHERMAN

Now it may be hundreds of years agone that there lived a worthy old fisherman: and he was seated on a fine evening before his door, mending his nets. The part of the country where he lived was right pleasant to behold. The grassy space on which his cottage stood ran far into the lake, and perchance one might well conceive that it was through love of the clear blue waters that the tongue of land had stretched itself among them; while with embrace as close and as loving the lake sent its arms round the

pleasaunce where the flowers bloomed and the trees yielded their grateful shade. It was as though water welcomed land and land welcomed water, and it was this made both so lovely. But on this happy sward the fisherman and his household dwelt alone. Few human beings, or rather none at all, even cared to visit it. For you must know that at the back of this little tongue of land there lay a fearsome forest right perilous to traverse. It was dark and solitary and pathless, and many a marvellous strange creature and many a wraith and spectral illusion haunted its glades, so that none might dare adventure unless a sheer necessity drave them.

Nathless, the worthy fisherman might pass unharmed, whensoever he was carrying some choice fish caught in his beautiful home to a large town bordering the confines of the forest. He was a man full of holy thoughts, and as he took his way through the gloomy shades peopled with forms of dread, he was wont to sing a pious chaunt with a clear voice, and an honest heart, and a conscience void of guile.

Well, the fisherman sate him over his nets, and he minded no evil, when a sudden fear came over him. He thought he heard a rustling noise in the forest as though a horse and rider were drawing every moment nearer to his little home. And it seemed as though all he had dreamed on many a stormy night of the wizardry of the forest was coming to his ken, and above all, the semblance of a snow-white man huge

At the back of this little tongue of land there lay
a fearsome forest right perilous to traverse

and terrible, who nodded his head unceasingly with vague and bodeful portent. Nay, but as he raised his eyes towards the wood, he thought he saw the nodding man drawing nigh through the branches of the trees. Yet comfort came to him and a better mind: for he bethought himself how no evil had befallen him even in the forest itself, and here upon the open tongue of land there was little chance of evil influences. So he said aloud a verse from Holy Writ, repeating it with all his heart, and his courage came back so that he almost laughed at the vain fancy that had possessed him. And the white nodding man he saw to be nothing but a stream, well-known and familiar, which ran foaming from the forest and fell into the lake. But the noise he had heard was no fancy. It was in sooth caused by a gallant knight, bravely apparelled, who issued forth from the shadow of the wood and came riding towards the cottage. A scarlet mantle was thrown over his doublet, embroidered with gold; red and violet feathers waved from his golden-coloured headgear; and a beautiful sword, richly dight, flashed from his shoulder-belt. The white horse whereon the knight rode was more slender than chargers are wont to be, and as he trod lightly over the turf, it seemed as though the green and flowery carpet took no harm from the print of his hoofs.

It was a fair and comely sight to see the knight advance. Nathless, the old fisherman was not wholly at his ease, albeit that he told himself that no evil

might come to him from so much beauty. He stayed, therefore, quietly busy with his nets, politely taking off his head-gear as the stranger drew near, and saying never a word.

Presently the knight came up and asked whether he and his horse might have shelter and care for the night.

"Fair sir," quoth the fisherman, "as for your horse, I may give him no better stable than this shady meadow, and no better provender than the grass that groweth thereon. But for yourself I bid you welcome to my cottage, and glad shall I be to offer such supper and lodging as we have."

Right pleased was the knight: he dismounted forthwith, and with the fisherman's help took off both saddle and bridle from the horse, letting him loose upon the flowery green. Then turning to the fisherman: "Good fisherman," quoth he, "I thank thee. Yet had I found thee less hospitable and kind, methinks thou wouldst scarcely have got quit of me to-day. For, as I see, there is a broad lake before us, and behind lieth the wood. God forbid that I should ride back into its mysterious depths, now that the shades of night are falling "

"Nay, nay," quoth the fisherman, "we will not speak too much of that!' So he led his guest into the cottage.

Within, beside the hearth, whence a scanty fire shed a dim light through a clean-swept room, was

sitting the fisherman's old wife in a large chair. She rose as the knight entered to give him a kindly welcome, but seated herself again in the chair of honour without offering it to her guest. Whereupon saith the fisherman, with a smile, "Fair sir, thou must not be angered nor take it amiss that she hath not given to thee the best seat in the house. For it is a custom among poor people that only the aged should have it."

"Why, husband," quoth the dame, "of what art thou thinking? Doth not our guest belong to Christian folk, and how then might it come into his head, being of good young blood, to drive old people from their seats? Take a chair, I beseech thee, young master," said she, turning to the knight. "Pretty enough is the chair over yonder. Only treat it not with roughness, I beg thee, for one of its legs is none of the soundest."

Then the knight took the chair with care and seated himself upon it in all good humour; for indeed it seemed to him as though he were kinsman to this little household, and had but just come back from abroad.

The three soon began to talk in friendly and familiar manner. As to the forest, indeed, concerning which the knight asked some questions, the old man showed no desire to speak at large; for it was not a subject, it seemed to him, to discuss at nightfall. But of their home and former life the old couple spoke freely, and listened eagerly enough when the knight discoursed to them on his travels, and how he had a castle near the

source of the Danube, and how he was hight Sir Huldbrand of Ringstetten. While the talk went on pleasantly and eagerly, the knight became aware that now and again there was a splashing sound at the little low window, as though some one were throwing water against it. Each time the splash came, the old man knit his brow and seemed marvellously distempered. But when at length a whole shower dashed against the panes and bubbled into the room through the decayed window-frame, he rose, with anger in his face, and called out in threatening tones: "Undine," cried he, "wilt thou for once leave off these childish pranks? And to-day there is the more reason, for that there is a stranger knight with us in the cottage."

All grew silent without; only a low laugh was faintly heard, and the fisherman, as he came back from the window, addressed himself to the stranger. "Honoured sir," quoth he, "thou must needs pardon such tricks, and perchance many a freakish whim besides. For indeed, she meaneth no harm. It is but our foster-child, Undine, who though she hath already entered her eighteenth year, will not wean herself from such childishness. Nathless, as I have said, she hath a good heart."

"Nay, thou mayest talk," quoth the old dame. "Certès, when thou comest home from fishing or a journey her frolics may please thee well enough. But an thou hadst her with thee the whole day long, and heard not a sensible word, and so far from being a

help in the housekeeping as she grew older, found that it was only by much care and anxiety she could be kept from ruining us altogether by her follies—that meseemeth, is quite another thing; nor could the patience of a saint fail to be worn out at last."

"Ay, ay," quoth the fisherman with a smile, "thou hast thy troubles with the girl, and I have mine with the lake. Often it breaketh through my dams and teareth my nets to pieces. Yet I love it; and so too dost thou love the pretty elf, for all the torment and vexation she bringeth. Is it not so?"

"Nay," quoth the dame, "'tis impossible to be angry with her, and that is the truth." And she smiled, well pleased.

Then of a sudden the door flew open and lo! a strangely fair and beautiful maiden glided into the room, with happy laughter on her lips. "Thou hast jested with me, father," saith she, "for where is thy guest?'

And then she saw him. Full of wonder and amazement she stood watching the handsome knight; while Huldbrand, on his part, looked with all the more earnestness at her beautiful face, because he deemed that it was but her momentary surprise which lent her so strange a charm. Right soon, he thought, will she turn away her eyes and become all the more bashful and composed. But it was not so. When she had gazed her full, she drew near to him confidingly, and knelt at his feet; and while she played with a gold

medal hanging from a rich chain on his breast, she whispered:

"Kind sir and handsome guest, why then is it that thou art come at last to our poor cottage? Hast thou wandered about the world for years and only now found thy way? Is it out of that wild forest that thou comest, my beautiful knight?"

The quick reproof of the angry beldame gave him no moment for reply. Sternly she bade the maiden behave herself seemly, and go to her work. But Undine, minding not a jot for all her words, drew a little footstool close to Huldbrand's chair and sat down on it with her spinning. "It is here that I will work," quoth she. The old man did, as parents are wont to do with spoilt children. He made as though he had marked naught of Undine's wilfulness, and was beginning to talk of something else. But this the girl would not suffer. "I have asked," said she, "our beautiful guest whence he cometh, and he hath not answered me as yet."

"I come," saith Huldbrand, "from the forest."

Then said she, "Thou must tell me how you came there, for all men dread it: and what marvellous adventures befell thee, for without some strange things of the sort no man can win his way."

Now Huldbrand shuddered at the memory, and as he looked towards the window, it seemed as though one of the weird figures he had met in the forest were pushing in his grinning face; but it was but the deep

dark night that he saw, shrouding everything without. So he collected himself and was about to begin his tale, when the fisherman broke in. "Sir Knight," quoth he, "this is no fit hour for such discourse as this." Whereupon Undine sprang angrily from her stool, and standing straight before the old man with her little hands pressed to her sides, "Father," cried she, "he is not to tell his story? He shall not? But I will have it! It is my will! He shall, in spite of you!" And she stamped her foot on the floor.

Now, albeit that she was violent enough, she wore through all her fury so comic a grace that Huldbrand could but the more eagerly watch her anger than at first he did her gentleness. But far other did it fare with the fisherman. His wrath, which hitherto he had suppressed, burst forth in open flame, and with harsh words he reproved Undine's disobedience and unmannerly behaviour towards the stranger, his good old wife joining with him heartily. But Undine cared not a jot. "If ye choose to scold," cried she, "and will not do what I want, ye may sleep alone in your smoky old hut!" And like an arrow she was at the door and out into the dark night.

CHAPTER II

HOW UNDINE HAD COME TO THE FISHERMAN

Now when she had gone, both Huldbrand and the fisherman sprang from their seats and were bent on following the angry girl. But before they had reached the cottage door, Undine had long vanished in the darkness without, and not a sound of her light footstep betrayed whither she had gone. Huldbrand looked questioningly at his host. "Perchance," he mused to himself, "this sweet vision, which hath gone back again into the night, is but one of those marvellous shapes which, a short while agone, played their mad tricks upon me in the forest."

But the old man muttered between his teeth:

"This is not the first time that she hath treated us thus. Now shall we have aching hearts and sleepless eyes the livelong night; for who knoweth but that she may sometime come to harm, if she remaineth alone in the dark until daylight?"

"Then for God's sake," cried the knight, "let us follow her forthwith!"

"And what would be the use?" returned the old man. "It would be a sin were I to let you pursue the foolish girl in solitude and darkness; while as for me, my old limbs could not catch the runaway, even if we knew whither she had gone."

"Nathless," quoth Huldbrand, "let us at least call after her and beg her to come back;" and eagerly did he raise his voice, "Undine! Undine! Come back!"

But the old man shook his head. "Little good will shouting serve," saith he. "Thou knowest not her perversity." And yet he too could not forbear to call, "Undine! Undine! Come back, I beg you, come back—if only this once!"

It came to pass, however, as the fisherman had surmised. No Undine could be seen or heard, and since the old man could by no means suffer that Huldbrand should go forth alone, they had perforce to return to the cottage. There they found the fire almost extinguished on the hearth, while the old wife, to whom Undine's flight and danger seemed of far smaller moment than they did to her husband, had already retired to rest. The fisherman bestirred himself to blow up the

embers, and put fresh wood upon them ; and by the light of the kindling flame he sought out a tankard of wine, which he placed between himself and his guest.

"Sir Knight," quoth he, "I perceive that thou too art disturbed about the silly girl. It were better, methinks, that we both should talk and drink and so pass the night, than that we should toss sleeplessly upon our rush mats. Is it not so?"

Huldbrand readily agreed. The fisherman made him take the old housewife's seat of honour, and thereupon they drank and talked as beseemed two honest and worthy men. Howbeit, as often as anything seemed to move before the windows, or even at times when nothing was moving, one of the two would start, and look up and whisper, "She is coming!" And then they would be silent for a space, and when nothing appeared they would shake their heads with a sigh, and resume their talk. Yet, as neither of them could help but think of Undine, naught pleased them better than that the fisherman should tell, and the knight should hear, the story how Undine had first come to the cottage. So the fisherman began, as followeth :

"It may be," saith he, "some fifteen years ago that I was one day passing through that wild forest to sell my fish at the city. As for my wife, she was resting at home, as is her wont; and at that time, I wis, for a happy cause, for God had given us two old people a marvellously fair child. A girl she was; and

it had come into our minds whether for the sake of the new comer it might be a wiser course to leave this beautiful home, and seek a more habitable spot in which to bring up our treasure. Poor folk, as thou dost know, Sir Knight, have not always full liberty in such cases; but, Heaven helping, each must do as he can. Now the matter somewhat troubled me, as I went along, for this slip of land was dear to me, and I bethought me with a shudder amid the noise and brawls of the city, how it might come to pass that in such a bustle, or in some scene not much quieter, I should have perforce to take up my abode. Nathless, no murmur against the good God passed my lips. Nay, I thanked him in secret for my new-born babe. Nor yet can I say that aught befell me, either going or returning, out of the common way. At that time nothing had I seen of the marvels and portents of the wood. The Lord was ever with me in its mysterious shades."

At that he lifted his cap reverently from his bald head, and stayed for a while musing with prayerful thoughts. Then, covering himself once more, he went on as followeth:

"Alack," saith he, "on this side of the forest a great sorrow awaited me. With tears in her eyes, and all clad in mourning, my wife came to meet me. 'O gracious God,' I sobbed, 'where is our child?'

"'Our child is with Him on whom thou hast called,' returned she.

"We entered the cottage together, weeping silently. And then, when I had looked round for the little corpse and found it not, I learnt all that had chanced. My wife had sat her down with the child by the edge of the lake. Right happily was she playing with it, and void of all fear, when on a sudden the little one bent forward, as though she had seen something marvellously fair beneath the waves. My wife saw her laugh, the dear angel, and put forth her little hands: and in a moment she had sprung out of her arms and disappeared beneath the glittering mirror of the lake. Anxiously and long did I seek for our lost one; but it was all in vain. No trace of her was to be found.

"That selfsame evening we were sitting, childless and alone, in the cottage. Neither had any pleasure in talk, nor indeed would our tears have allowed it. It seemed better to gaze into the fire and utter never a word. On a sudden, something rustled outside the door, which straightway opened; and lo! a beautiful little girl, clad in rich garments, stood there on the threshold, smiling at us. Marvellously astonied were we; as for me, I wist not whether it might be illusion or reality on which I gazed. But I saw the water dripping from her golden hair and her rich garment, and methought the pretty child had been lying in the water and needed our help. 'Good wife,' said I, 'no one hath been able to save our dear one; let us, at least, do for others what would have been so

A beautiful little girl clad in rich garments
stood there on the threshold smiling

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blessed a boon for ourselves.' So we took the little one and undressed her, put her to bed and gave her something warm; but she, meanwhile, spoke not a word. Only she smiled upon us with eyes full of the colour of lake and sky.

"Next morning we saw at once that she had taken no hurt from her wetting, and methought I should ask her about her parents, and by what odd chance she had come hither. But full strange and confused was the account that she gave. Far away from here must she have been born; for, during these fifteen years past, not a word have I learnt of her parentage. Moreover, both then and since, her talk has been of such strange things that, for aught we can tell, she may have dropped down to us from the moon! Golden castles, crystal domes—of such does she prattle, and I know not what marvels beside. The simplest and clearest tale she tells is that, being out with her mother on the great lake she fell into the water, and that she only came to her senses here under the trees, when she found herself with joy on this right happy shore.

"Certès, we have had our fill of misgiving and perplexities. It was our mind forthwith to keep the child we had found, and to bring her up in the place of our lost darling; but who could reveal to us whether she had been baptized or no? On this matter she had naught to tell us. When we questioned her, it was her wont to answer that she knew full well that she was created for God's praise and glory, and that what-

ever might appertain to God's praise and glory she was well content should be done to her.

"Now it seemed to my wife and to me that, an she had not been baptized, there was no time for delay; whereas, an she had, we could not repeat a good thing too often. So, thinking it out, we sought for a good name for the child, for we were often at a loss what to call her. And, as we pondered, it seemed that Dorothea might be the best name, for I had heard that it signifieth *a gift of God*, and full sure had she been sent to us by God as a gift and comfort in our woe. But she would not hear of this; it irked her sore; Undine, she said, her parents had named her, and Undine she still would be. Now this appeared to me to be but a heathenish name, not to be found in any calendar; and for this reason I took counsel of a priest in the city. He approved the name no better than I did: but yet at my prayer he came with me through the forest in order to perform the right of baptism here in my cottage. So prettily clad was the little one, so sweetly did she bear herself, that she at once won the priest's heart. With such soft speech and cozening words did she flatter him, using the while such merry mockery, that he could remember none of the grave arguments he thought to use against the name Undine. Undine, therefore, was she baptized; and while the ceremony went on she held herself with much simplicity and sweetness, and seemed to have forgotten all the wild

The Infancy of Undine

Arthur Rackham '08

and untamed restlessness of her daily behaviour. For indeed, Sir Knight, my wife was wholly in the right when she told you that she hath been most difficult to bear with. If I were to tell——"

And here the knight stayed the fisherman's talk. He would fain call his notice to a sound of rushing waters which ever and anon had caught his ear while the old man rambled on. Now the water seemed to burst against the cottage window with redoubled force, and both sprang to the door. There, by the light of the lately risen moon, they saw the brook, which came from the forest, wildly overflowing its banks, and sweeping away stones and tree-trunks in its impetuous course. The storm, as if awakened by the tumult, broke furiously from the clouds that passed swiftly over the moon: the lake howled under the mad buffet of the wind: the trees of the little peninsula groaned from root to topmost bough, and bent dizzily over the surging waters.

"Undine! For Heaven's sake, Undine!" cried the two men in terror. Not a word came back in answer, and without further thought they rushed out of the cottage, one in this direction, the other in that, searching and calling for Undine.

CHAPTER III

HOW UNDINE WAS FOUND AGAIN

HEREUPON the story telleth how Huldbrand fared in his search for Undine.

The longer he sought for her beneath the shades of the trees and found her not, the more anxious and distraught did he become. Once more the thought that Undine was but a phantom, a vision caused by the mysterious forest, took possession of him. Indeed, as the waves howled and the tempest roared, and the trees crashed down in ruin, the complete change and contrast in a scene which had been but a few moments agone so peaceful and beautiful, made him marvel whether peninsula, cottage and fisherman were not all a

mockery and an illusion. Yet still from afar he could hear through the din the cries of the old man for Undine, and the wife's loud prayers and hymns.

At length cometh he to the brink of the swollen stream and marked how it had driven its wild course right in front of the forest, so that the peninsula was turned into an island. "Ah, God," he thought, "it might well be that Undine has adventured herself into that fearful wood—perchance in her pretty petulance because I was not allowed to tell her aught of its horrors; and now behold how the stream severs us from her, and she may well be weeping on the other side alone, among ghosts and spectres!" Sharply did he cry out in his terror, and swiftly did he clamber down some rocks and uprooted pine-stems, that he might reach the raging stream and by wading or swimming across find the fugitive on the other side. He bethought him of all the shapes of wonder and fear that he had encountered even in daylight beneath the branches that now rustled and roared so ceaselessly. And more than all, it seemed to him as though on the opposite shore a tall man in white, whom he knew only too well, were grinning and nodding at him in mockery. It was these very monstrous forms which urged him to cross the flood, as he bethought him that Undine might be among them, alone in her agony.

Now, as he grasped the stout branch of a pine and stood, supporting himself by it in the midst of the

current, which only with all his force could he withstand; and while yet with unblenching courage he pressed further into the stream : he heard a soft voice which said to him, "Venture not, venture not; full crafty is that old man, the stream!" He knew the sweet tones : he stood there, beneath the shadows which shrouded the moon, as though in a trance, all dizzy and bewildered in the waves which were now rapidly rising up to his very waist. Nathless he would not desist.

"If thou are not really there, if thou art but a floating mist, then let me too cease to live and become a shadow like thee, thou dear Undine!" Crying these words aloud, he stepped deeper still into the waters.

"Look round, look round," came a voice to his ear; and as he turned he saw by the moonlight, momentarily unveiled, a little island encircled by the flood; and there under the branches of the overhanging trees was Undine, smiling and nestling happily in the flowery grass.

Ah, how much more joyously now than before did the knight use the aid of his stout pine-branch! Nimbly he crossed the flood, and stood beside the maiden on a little plot of grass, safely guarded and screened by the good old trees. Undine half raised herself from the ground, and under the green leafy tent, throwing her arms round his neck, she drew the knight down beside her on her soft couch.

He saw by the moonlight momentarily unveiled, a little island encircled by the flood; and there under the branches of the overhanging trees was Undine

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1909

"Beautiful friend," whispered she, "thou shalt tell me thy story here. Here the cross old people cannot hear us. And our roof of leaves giveth us as good shelter as their poor old hut!"

"Nay, but it is Paradise itself!" quoth Huldbrand, as he covered her face with eager kisses.

Meantime the fisherman had come to the edge of the stream and raised his voice to the young people. "Why, how is this, Sir Knight?" said he, "I welcomed thee as one honest man may welcome another. and behold, I find thee playing in secret the lover with my foster-child, and leaving me the while to run hither and thither through the night in search of her!"

"I have only just found her myself, old father," returned the knight.

"So much the better," was the answer; "and now bring her across forthwith to firm ground."

But this Undine would by no means allow. She protested that she would rather go with the stranger into the depths of the forest than return to the cottage where no one would do what she wished, and from which the knight himself would sooner or later depart. Then, again throwing her arms round Huldbrand, she sang with pretty grace:

A stream flowed forth of a darkling vale
And sought the bright sea-shore:
In the ocean's depths it found a home
And never returnèd more!

The old man wept bitterly at her song, but this seemed not to move her a jot. She was all for kissing and caressing her new friend, until he said to her, "Undine, if the old man's grief touch not thy heart, it toucheth mine; let us go back to him."

She opened wide her large eyes in wonder, and spoke at last slowly and hesitatingly. "If this be thy wish, well and good. What is right for thee is right for me. But the old man yonder must first give me his word that he will let thee tell me what thou sawest in the wood and—other things will follow as they must."

"Come, only come," cried the fisherman, unable to utter another word. He stretched his hands to her across the rushing stream, and as he nodded his head as though in fulfilment of her request, his white hair fell strangely over his face in such sort that Huldbrand bethought himself of the nodding white man of the forest. But not letting himself think of anything that might baffle or confuse him, the knight took the beautiful girl in his arms and bore her over the narrow space where the stream had divided her little island from the shore.

The old man fell on Undine's neck and seemed as though he could never have his fill of joy; his good wife also came up and with great tenderness kissed her recovered child. No word of reproach passed their lips, and even Undine, forgetting all her petulance, almost overwhelmed her foster-parents with

The Knight took the beautiful girl in his arms and bore her over the narrow space where the stream had divided her little island from the shore

loving endearments. When at last they had recovered themselves of their transports, lo, it was already dawn and the lake shone rosy red. Peace had followed storm and the little birds were singing merrily on the dripping branches. And now when Undine insisted on hearing the knight's story, the old couple smiled and readily acceded to her wish. They brought out breakfast under the trees which screened the cottage from the lake and then sate down with thankful hearts. Undine, because she must needs have it so, lay on the grass at Huldbrand's feet, the while he proceeded with his story.

CHAPTER IV

OF THAT WHICH BEFELL THE KNIGHT IN THE WOOD

Now this is what Huldbrand told of the things that had befallen him. "Eight days agone," saith he, "I rode into the imperial city which is on the other side of the forest. And it chanced that, hard on my arrival, there was a splendid tournament and running at the ring, and certès, I spared neither horse nor lance. Once, as I stood still at the lists, resting after the toil that I loved, and was handing my helmet back to my squire, lo, I espied a very beautiful woman standing, richly dight, in one of the spectators' galleries.

"I asked those about me and learnt that the name of the lady was Bertalda, and that she was the foster-daughter of a mighty duke in the land. Now her eyes rested on me, as mine on her; and as is the wont of

young knights, forasmuch as I had already ridden bravely, I bore myself for the rest of the encounter with yet higher courage. That evening I was Bertalda's partner in the dance, and so I remained all the days of the festival."

Hereupon a sharp pain in his left hand, which was hanging down, stayed Huldbrand in his discourse, and he looked down to see what might be the cause. Undine had bitten hard his finger, and seemed marvelously gloomy and distempered. Of a sudden, however, she looked up into his eyes with gentle, sorrowful face, and whispered very softly, "'Tis thou who art to blame!" hiding her face the while. The knight began to speak again, in no small measure perplexed and thoughtful.

"Now, this Bertalda was a wayward and a haughty damsel. She pleased me not so much the second day as the first, and the third day still less. Nathless, I busied myself about her, for that she seemed to hold me in higher favour than other knights; and thus it befell that once in sport I besought her for one of her gloves. 'Sir Knight,' quoth she, 'I will give it to thee when, all by thyself, thou hast searched the ill-omened forest through and through, and canst bring me tidings of its marvels.' I recked little of her glove; but the word of a knight once given cannot be withdrawn, and a man of honour needs no second prompting to a deed of valour."

"Methought she loved you," saith Undine.

"Ay, so it seemed," returned Huldbrand.

"Why, then," laughed the maiden, "right foolish must she be to drive from her the man she loved—and, moreover, into a wood of evil fame! The forest and its mysteries might have waited long enough for me!"

Huldbrand smiled fondly at Undine.

"Yester morning," quoth he, "I set off on my enterprise. The morning was fair, and the red tints of sunrise caught the tree-stems and lay along the green turf. The leaves were whispering merrily together, and in my heart I could have laughed at the silly folk who were frightened at so beautiful a place. 'Full soon shall I have passed and repassed the wood,' said I to myself with confident gaiety, and ere I had had time to bethink myself of the matter I was deeply plunged into the thick glades, and could see no more the plain that lay behind me. Thereupon it came to my mind for the first time that I might easily lose my way in the forest, and that perchance this was the only peril the traveller had to face. So I paused awhile and looked round at the position of the sun, which meanwhile had risen higher in the heavens. As I looked I saw something black in the branches of a high oak. 'A bear, maybe,' I thought, and I felt for my sword. But it spoke with a human voice, all harsh and ugly, and called to me from above: 'Sir Malapert,' it cried, 'an I fail to nibble away the branches up here, what shall we have to roast you

with at midnight?' And so saying it grinned and made the branches shake and rustle in such sort that my horse, grown wild with terror, galloped me away before I had time to see what kind of devil's beast it might be."

"Thou must not give him a name," said the fisherman, and he crossed himself. His wife did the like with never a word.

But Undine looked at the knight with sparkling eyes. "The best of the story is," quoth she, "that they have not roasted him! Go on, fair sir!"

So the knight went on with his tale.

"So wild was my horse that it went hard with me to stay him from charging the stems and branches of trees. He was dripping with sweat, and yet he would not suffer himself to be held in. At length he galloped straight towards a precipice. Whereupon it appeared to me as though a tall white man threw himself across the path. The horse, trembling with fear, stopped, and I regained my hold on him. Then for the first time did I become aware that what saved me was no man, but a brook, bright as silver, rushing down from a hill by my side, and crossing and stemming my horse's path."

"Thanks, dear Brook," cried Undine, clapping her hands. But the old man shook his head and bent him thoughtfully over the ground.

Huldbrand continueth his tale. "Scarce," quoth he, "had I settled myself in the saddle and taken a

firm grip on the reins, when, lo, a marvellous little man, very small and hideous beyond measure, stood at my side. Tawny brown was his skin, and his nose almost as big as his whole body, while, grinning like a clown and stretching wide his huge mouth, he kept bowing and scraping over and over again. Since this fool's play pleased me but ill, I gave him brief good-day, and turned about my horse which still quivered with fear. Methought I would find some other adventure or else I would bestir myself homeward, for, during my wild gallop, the sun had already passed the meridian. Whereupon, quick as lightning, the little fellow whipped round and again stood before my horse. 'Make room there,' I cried angrily, 'the animal is fiery and may easily overrun thee.' 'Oh, ay,' snarled the imp, grinning yet more hideously, 'give me first some drink-money, for it was I who stopped your horse; without my aid both thou and he would now be lying in the stony ravine, Ugh!' 'Make no more faces,' quoth I; 'take your gold, albeit that thou liest, for see, it was the good brook that saved me and not thou, thou wretched wight!' And therewith I dropped a piece of gold into the quaint cap which he held before me in his begging. And I made as though I would ride on. But he shrieked aloud, and swifter than can be imagined he was once more at my side. I urged my horse to a gallop; the imp ran too, and strange enough were the contortions he made with his body,

He held up the gold piece, crying at each leap of his, "False gold! false coin! false coin!"

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half laughable and half horrible, the while he held up the gold piece, crying at each leap of his, 'False gold! false coin! false coin! false gold!' And these words he uttered in such sort, with so hollow a sound from out his breast, that one might well conceive that after each shriek he would fall dead to the ground.

"Moreover his hideous red tongue lolled out of his mouth. And for my part, I stopped in doubt and said, 'What meaneth this screaming? Take another gold piece or yet another; but quit my side.' Once more he began his strange mockery of courtesy and snarled: 'Not gold, not gold, young sir,' quoth he, 'enough and to spare of that trash have I myself, as forthwith I will show you.' Thereupon of a sudden it appeared to me as if the solid ground were as transparent as green glass, and the smooth earth were a round ball, wherein a multitude of goblins made sport with silver and gold. Heads up and heads down they rolled hither and thither, pelting one another in jest with the precious ore and blowing gold dust in perverse sport into one another's eyes. My horrible comrade stood partly on the ground and partly within it; at times he bade the others reach him up handfuls of gold: then with harsh laugh, having shown them to me, he would fling them down clattering into the bottomless abyss. Thereupon he minded to show the piece of gold I had given him to the goblins below and they laughed themselves half dead over it

and hissed out at me. At length they all pointed their stained fingers at me, and more and more wildly, more and more densely, and more and more madly, the whole swarm came clambering up to me. A terror seized me as erst it had seized my horse; clapping the spurs into him I galloped, for the second time, I know not how far into the forest.

"But when at last I stayed my wild course the coolness of evening was around me. A white foot-path—so it appeared to me—gleamed through the branches of the trees, and that methought must needs lead to the city. Full eager was I to work my way thither: but lo, a face, white, indistinct, with features constantly changing, was ever peering at me between the leaves. Try as I might to avoid it, it accompanied me wherever I turned. And being wroth thereat, I drave my horse against it, when the phantom gushed forth volumes of water upon us and forced us, willy-nilly, to retreat. So that at the last, perpetually diverting us step by step from the path, it left the way open only in one direction: and so long as we obeyed its guidance, though it kept close behind, it did us no harm.

"From time to time I eyed it and meseemed that the white face that had besprinkled us with foam belonged to a body equally white and of gigantic stature. Full oft I fancied that it was but a moving stream: but never did I gain any certainty on this matter. Horse and knight both wearied out, we yielded

At length they all pointed their stained fingers at me

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to the influence of the white man, who kept nodding his head as though he would say 'Quite right, quite right!' And so at the last we came out here to the end of the forest, where I saw grass and lake and your little hut, and the white man vanished."

"'Tis well that he hath gone," muttered the fisherman; and now he began to mind him how best his guest might return to his friends in the city. Whereupon Undine laughed slyly, and Huldbrand perceiving it addressed her: "Undine," quoth he, "methought thou wert glad to see me here. Why then dost rejoice when there is talk of my departure?"

"Because thou cannot go," returned Undine; "essay the task, an thou wilt: cross that swollen stream with boat or horse or thine own legs, according to thy fancy. Nay but do not try, for sure would be thy fate: thou wouldest be crushed by the stones and tree-trunks swirling down its course like lightning. And as for the lake, full well I know it; Father dare not adventure himself far enough out with his boat."

Thereat Huldbrand arose with a smile that he might see whether Undine were right. The old man bore him company: and the maiden danced merrily along by their side. And in sooth Undine was right, and the knight found that he must needs abide on the tongue of land that was now an island, until such time as the flood might subside.

As the three made their way back to the cottage, the knight bent his head to whisper in the maiden's

ear: "How is it," quoth he, "my pretty Undine, art angry that I stay?"

"Ah," saith she petulantly, "let me be. Had I not bitten thy hand, who knoweth how much more of Bertalda might not have appeared in the story?"

CHAPTER V

HOW THE KNIGHT FARED ON THE PENINSULA

Now my story hath a pause. Perchance, thou too, who readest these lines, may, after many a buffet in this rude world, have reached at length some haven where all was well with thee. Home and the peace of home, which all must needs desire, appeal strongly to thy heart: and here thou thinkest is a home where the flowers of childhood may bloom—ay, and that pure deep love which resteth on the graves of our dead may encircle thee. 'Tis good thou sayest to be here, and here will I build me an habitation. Nay, an thou mayest have erred and have had afterwards to do bitter penance for thine error, that mattereth not to thee now, nor wilt thou sadden thyself with unwelcome memories.

But call up again in thee thy sweet hopes of future joy which no tongue may utter, bring back again to thy mind that heavenly sense of peace, and then, methinks, thou shalt know somewhat of how it was with Huldbrand while he lived on the peninsula.

Full oft he saw, and it pleasured him right well, how every day the forest stream rolled along more wildly ; how it made its bed ever wider and wider, and so prolonged his stay on the island. Part of the day it was his wont to ramble with an old crossbow which he had found in a corner of the cottage and had repaired ; and watching for the waterfowl, he shot all he could for the cottage kitchen. When he brought back his booty, Undine would oft upbraid him for his cruelty in robbing the happy birds of their life ; yea, she would shed bitter tears at the sight. But, an it chanced that he brought nothing home, then she would scold him no less earnestly, for that now, through his carelessness and want of skill, they must needs be content with a fare of fish alone. Nathless, her pretty scoldings pleased him right well ; the more so as she made amends for her angry reproaches by the sweetest caresses.

Now the old people saw how it was with the young pair, and they were well content ; they looked upon them as betrothed or as already married, so that they might still live on in this isolation, and be a succour and a help to them in their old age. Nay, to Huldbrand himself the loneliness of the place seemed to

suggest the thought that he was already Undine's accepted suitor. To him it appeared as if there were no world beyond these encircling waters, and no other men with whom he might mingle if he recrossed them. When at times his horse might chance to neigh to remind him of knightly deeds, or the coat of arms on his saddle and horsegear confront him with a frown, or his sword of a sudden fall from its nail on the wall, slipping from its scabbard as it fell: he would stay his uneasiness by murmuring to himself "Undine, certès, is no fisherman's daughter: she is sprung more likely from a princely house in some foreign land." But one matter irked him sore. It was when the old dame scolded Undine in his presence. Not that the maiden cared a jot, she was wont to laugh and took no pains to hide her mirth. But his own honour seemed concerned therein, albeit that he could not blame the fisherman's wife, for Undine ever deserved ten times the reproof that she received. In his heart he could not but feel that the balance was in the old woman's favour. And so his life flowed on in happiness and peace.

There came, however, a break at last. It was the habit of the fisherman and the knight when they sate them down to their midday meal, or in the evening when the wind, as it commonly did, roared without, to share together a flask of wine. But now the store that the old man had brought from time to time in his visits to the city was exhausted, and the two men were

quite out of humour in consequence. Undine laughed gaily at them all day, but for their part they were neither of them merry enough to join in her jests as usual. Towards evening she left the cottage to avoid, as she said, faces so long and so dismal. As night fell, there were again signs of a storm and the waters began to rush and roar. Full of fear, the knight and the fisherman sprang to the door to bring home the maiden, for they bethought them of the anxiety of that night when Huldbrand first came to the cottage. But Undine swiftly came up to them, clapping her little hands with joy. "What will ye give me," quoth she, "if I provide some wine? or rather, give me nothing, for it will content me well if ye look merrier and be of better cheer than throughout this dismal day. Only come with me, the stream has thrown a cask ashore. 'Tis a winecask for certain, or else let me pay the penalty with a week's sleep!" The men followed her forthwith, and sure enough in a sheltered creek they found a cask which they ardently hoped might contain the generous liquor for which they thirsted.

With as much haste as possible they rolled the cask towards the cottage, for the western sky was overcast with heavy storm-clouds, and they might see in the twilight the waves of the lake lifting their foamy crests as if looking for the rain which must shortly come down. Undine helped the men all she might, and when the storm threatened to burst on their

heads, she uttered a laughing reproof to the clouds. "Come, come," saith she, "look to it that ye wet us not; we are still some way from shelter." The old man warned her that she might suffer for such presumption; but she laughed softly to herself, and no evil came of it to any one. Nay more, to their surprise they reached the hearth with their prize perfectly dry; and not till they had opened the cask and found that it contained a most exquisite wine, did the rain burst from the dark cloud and the storm sweep through the tree-tops and over the heaving waves of the lake.

Full soon a score of bottles were filled from the cask, promising a supply for many days, and they sate them round the glowing fire, drinking with many a merry jest and comfortably secure against the raging storm without. Of a sudden, however, the fisherman became grave. "Ah, great God," saith he, "here we be, rejoicing over this rich treasure and, mayhap, he to whom it once belonged hath lost his life in the waters that robbed him of his possession."

"Nay, that he hath not," returned Undine, and she filled the knight's cup to the brim with a smile.

But Huldbrand answered, "By my honour, old father, an I knew where to find and rescue him, no task of peril by night would I shirk. This much, however, I can promise. If ever it be my lot to return to places where my fellows live, I will seek out the owner of this wine or his heirs, and pay for it two-

fold or threefold." The speech pleased the old man full well; he nodded approvingly and drained his cup with greater pleasure and a clearer conscience.

But Undine was not so pleased. "Do as thou wilt," quoth she, "with thy gold and thy repayment, but about thy venturing out in search, thou spakest foolishly. I should weep full sore if thou wert lost in the attempt; and is it not truth that thou wouldest fain stay with me and the good wine?"

"Ay, in sooth," quoth Huldbrand, with a smile.

"Then," saith Undine, "thy words were foolish. For charity, it is said, beginneth at home, and in what do other people concern us?"

The old woman turned away with a sigh, shaking her head, while the fisherman forgot for the nonce his love for the maiden and scolded her. "Thy speech," saith he, as he finished his reproof, "soundeth as though Turks and heathen had brought thee up. May Heaven forgive both me and thee, thou manner-less girl!"

"Well," returned Undine, "'tis what I feel for all that, let who will have brought me up; and what availeth thy sermon?"

"Be silent," cried the fisherman; and Undine, who in spite of her petulance, was very timid, shrank from him. Trembling she nestled close to Huldbrand's side, and softly murmured, "Art thou also wroth with me, dear friend!" The knight for answer pressed her hand and stroked her hair. Naught could he say,

When the storm threatened to burst on their heads, she uttered a laughing reproof to the clouds. "Come, come," saith she, "look to it that you wet us not"

for it irked him that the old people should be so severe against Undine. But he kept his lips closed, and thus they all sat opposite to each other for a while in embarrassed silence with anger in their hearts.

CHAPTER VI

TELLETH OF A WEDDING

Now in the midst of this stillness came the sound of soft knocking at the door, and startled those that were within; for, at times, but a trifling incident can scare us, when it happeneth unexpectedly. But in this case there was the more reason for alarm in that the enchanted forest lay so near, and that the little promontory appeared out of the reach of all human visitors. They looked at each other with doubt in their faces, and when the knocking came again, and this time accompanied with a groan, the knight sprang to reach his sword. But the old man whispered softly, "Sir Knight," quoth he, "an it be what I fear, no weapon will be of avail." Meantime Undine approached the door and called out boldly and angrily, "Spirits of the earth, I warn ye! If ye mean mischief, Kühleborn shall teach ye better!"

Words so full of mystery only added to the terror

of the others, and they looked at the maiden fearfully. When Huldbrand, however, was minded to ask Undine what she might mean by such a speech, there came a voice from without. "I am no spirit of the earth," it said, "but a spirit still within its earthly frame. I pray ye within the hut, if ye fear God and will help me, open to me."

Undine at these words opened the door and held out a lantern into the night, so that they perceived an aged priest standing there. He stepped back in wonder: full startled was he to see so beautiful a maiden at the humble cottage entrance, and he might well suppose in such a case that witchcraft and magic were at work. So he began to pray, "All good spirits praise the Lord God!"

"No spirit am I," saith Undine, smiling. "Do I then look so ugly? Moreover, thou mayest see that holy words do not frighten me. I, too, know of God, and understand how to praise him—every one in his own way, to be sure, for so hath he created us. Come in, reverend father, thou art come among good people."

So the holy man came in, bowing and looking around him. Full venerable and mild was his demeanour, but the water was dropping from every fold of his garment, and from his long white beard and his white hair. The fisherman and knight took him into another chamber, and gave him clothes to wear, while they left his own wet attire for the women to dry. The old man thanked them in humble and courteous sort; but

he would on no account take the knight's rich mantle when it was offered to him, choosing instead an old grey overcoat of the fisherman. Thereupon they returned to the outer room, and the old dame at once gave up her easy chair for the reverend father, and would not rest till he had sate himself down in it. "For," quoth she, "thou art old and weary, and a priest to boot." Moreover, Undine pushed under the stranger's feet the little stool on which she was wont to sit by Huldbrand's side, and showed herself in all ways gentle and kind towards the priest. Huldbrand whispered some jest about it in her ear, but she answered full seriously, "He is a servant of Him who hath made us all: holy things must not be mocked."

Then the knight and fisherman refreshed their guest with food and wine, and when he had somewhat recovered himself he began to tell his story. He told how the day before he had set out from his monastery, which lay far on the other side of the great lake, with intent to journey to the Bishop, for that he ought to know how deep was the distress into which both monastery and its dependent villages had fallen owing to the present marvellous floods. He had gone far out of his way, for the floods compelled him, and this day towards evening he had been forced to ask the aid of two stout boatmen to cross an arm of the lake, where the water had overflown its banks. "Hardly, however," said he, "had our little craft touched the waves when the furious storm came down upon us

which is now raging over our heads. It seemed as though the waters had only waited our approach to begin their maddest dance with our boat. The oars were torn out of the hands of the boatmen and driven by the force of the waves further and further beyond our reach. Ourselves, a helpless prey in the hands of natural forces, drifted over the surging billows towards your distant shore, which we saw looming through the mist and foam. Then our boat was caught in a giddy whirlpool, and for myself I know not whether I was upset or fell overboard. Suffice it to say that in a vague agony of approaching death, I drifted on, till a wave cast me here, under the trees of your island."

"Island," cried the fisherman, "ay, 'tis an island for sure! But a day or two agone, it was a point of land; but, now that stream and lake have alike been bewitched, all is changed with us."

"Ay, so it seemed to me," said the priest, "as I crept along the shore in the dark. Naught but the wild uproar could I hear, but at last I saw a beaten footpath, which lost itself in the waters, and then I caught sight of the light in your cottage and ventured hither. Nor can I ever thank enough my Heavenly Father that he hath saved me from death and led me to such good and pious people as ye are; the more so, since I know not, whether beside you four, I shall ever look upon human beings again."

"What mean you by that?" asked the fisherman.

"Know you then," replied the holy man, "how

long this turmoil of the elements may last? And I am old in years. Full easily may the stream of my life run itself out ere the overflow of the forest stream may subside. And indeed it were not impossible that more and more of the flood may force itself between you and yonder forest, until you are cut off from the rest of the world in such sort that your fishing-boat may not suffice to carry you across. Then the dwellers on the continent beyond, giving themselves up to their own pleasures and cares, may entirely forget you in your old age."

The old wife started at this, and crossing herself, said, "God forbid!"

But the fisherman looked at her with a smile. "What strange creatures we are," quoth he. "Even were it so, things would not be very different—at least not for thee, dear wife—than they are now. For many years past hast thou ever been further than the edge of the forest? And hast thou seen any human beings other than Undine and myself? The knight and this holy man are but recent visitors; and they will stay with us even if this become a forgotten island. Methinks thou wouldest be a gainer by it, after all!"

"I know not," said the dame, "it is a gloomy thought to be altogether cut off from other people even though we neither see them nor know them."

"Then thou wilt stay with us; thou wilt stay with us!" whispered Undine, in a low, chanting voice, as

she nestled closer to Huldbrand's side. But he was lost in deep and strange thoughts. Since the priest spoke his last words, the other side of the forest seemed to fade away; the island grew more green and smiled more freshly to his thought. The maiden whom he loved shone as the fairest rose of this little spot of earth, and even of the world—and lo, there was a priest ready at hand! Moreover, at that moment, the old dame shot an angry glance at the maiden, because even in the presence of the holy man she leaned so closely on the knight; and it seemed that a torrent of reproach might break forth. So Huldbrand turned him to the priest and exclaimed: "Holy Father," quoth he, "thou seest before thee a pair betrothed to one another, and if this maiden and these good people have no word to say, thou shalt wed us this very evening." The old couple marvelled greatly at this speech. Somewhat of the kind had indeed ere this entered their minds. But they had never given it utterance; and the knight's words came upon them as something wholly new and unexpected. And Undine had of a sudden grown grave, casting her eyes down to the ground in thought; while the priest inquired of the facts of the case and asked whether the old people gave their consent or no. And much discourse took place ere the matter was finally settled.

The old dame went to prepare the bridal chamber for the youthful pair, and to seek out two consecrated tapers which had long been in her possession and

which she deemed necessary for the nuptial ceremony. Meantime the knight unfastened his gold chain, so that he might take off two gold rings to make exchange with his bride. Undine, however, when she saw what he did, roused her from her reverie. "Nay, not so," she cried, "my parents have not sent me into the world quite destitute; on the contrary, they must surely have reckoned that such an evening as this would come." Thus saying, she quickly left the room and came back in a moment with two costly rings, one of which she gave to the bridegroom and kept the other herself. The old fisherman marvelled greatly thereat, and yet more his wife, for neither had ever seen these jewels in the child's possession.

"See," said Undine, "my parents had these baubles sewn into the beautiful gown I was wearing when I came to you. They forbade me to speak of them to any one before my wedding, so I unfastened them in secret and kept them hidden till now." Thereupon the priest stayed all further questionings by lighting the consecrated tapers. He placed them on a table and summoned the bridal pair to stand before him. With a few solemn words he gave them each to the other: the elder pair blest the younger; and the bride, trembling and thoughtful, leaned upon the knight.

Then spake the priest of a sudden. "Ye are strange people!" quoth he. "Why did ye tell me that ye were alone on the island? During the whole ceremony a tall stately figure, clad in a white mantle, has been

looking at me through the window opposite. He must be still there before the door if ye will invite him into the house." "God forbid," said the old dame shuddering: the fisherman shook his head in silence and Huldbrand sprang to the window. It seemed to him that he could still see a white streak, but it soon vanished altogether in the darkness. Wherefore he assured the priest that he must have been mistaken; and they all seated themselves together round the hearth.

CHAPTER VII

OF ALL THAT CHANCED ON THE EVENING OF THE WEDDING

Now, both before the marriage ceremony commenced, and while it was in progress, Undine had shown herself as quiet and gentle as might be. But now that the ceremony was over, it seemed as if all the strange and untoward humours that were in her burst forth wholly without restraint or shame. Childish she was, and childish were the tricks with which she teased both her wedded lord and her foster-parents. Nay, she even went so far as to spite and annoy the holy man to whom lately she had shown such reverent obeisance. When the foster-mother was all for reproving her, the knight stayed her with a few grave words, "for," saith he, "Undine is now my wife." Nathless, the knight was no better pleased with Undine's waywardness than were the others. It irked him sore that she should play the child; but no signs

and no warning words were of any avail. Yet it seemed that at times the bride took note of her husband's discomfiture, and then at once she became more quiet, sitting down by his side, caressing him with her hands, and whispering something smilingly into his ear, so that the wrinkles on his forehead would all be smoothed away. And then again the tender mood would pass, and some wild freak of temper would make her yet more perverse and froward; so that matters would be worse than they were before.

At last the priest addressed her with kind and serious words. "Lady," quoth he, "no man can look at thee without delight, for thou art fair and young to behold, and the eye of mortal man must needs yield to thy beauty. And yet I bid thee beware and take heed to thy ways, so that thy soul may be attuned and brought into harmony with that of thy wedded husband."

"What is this thou sayest?" answered Undine. "Thou talkest of my soul. And, indeed, it may well be that for most of the sons of men thou mayest utter a wise and seasonable caution. But I pray you, if I have no soul at all, what is it that I may do? In such case the task of harmony that thou prescribest seemeth to be difficult."

Now the priest turned him away and was silent when Undine spake thus. But she came over to him, and addressed him in more reverent sort. "Sir Priest," quoth she, "thou art angry with me, and I

know well the cause. Yet thou painest me with thine angry look; and thou must not pain any creature that liveth without due cause. Listen to me, I pray thee, and have patience with me; and for my part I will seek to tell thee plainly what I mean."

Thereupon it was clear that she had bent herself to give a full and plain account of something that had hitherto been concealed. But suddenly she hesitated, as though some secret hand of restraint had been laid upon her, and with a quick shudder she burst into a flood of tears. Not a person there knew what to make of her in this case. They gazed at her in silence, filled with dim and vague apprehension. For a moment or two she rested thus, and then, wiping away her tears, she looked gravely and earnestly at the holy man, and spake as follows:

"Meseemeth that there is something strange and difficult to understand about the soul. It hath a beauty of its own, hath it not? And yet to me it appeareth full of dread and awe. I ask thee, Sir Priest, might we not all of us be in better case if we never shared so beautiful and so perilous a gift?" Once again Undine was silent, as though waiting for some reply, and her tears had ceased to flow. All those in the cottage had started from their seats at her strange words, and had stepped back from her with something akin to horror in their eyes. Nathless, she looked neither to right nor to left, but only bent her gaze on the holy man, with a yearning of curiosity on her face,

as though she waited for some message of terrible import. And once more she spake.

"It must be a burden right heavy to bear, this soul of which thou speakest, for even the shadow of its approach filleth me with sadness and dread. And yet, God knoweth, I had pleasure and happiness enough in my life till now." Thereupon Undine burst into a fresh flood of tears, and covered her face with the raiment that she wore. And the priest went up to her with a solemn air, and spoke to her weighty words, conjuring her, by the name of the Most Holy, to rend and cast aside the veil that enveloped her, if so be that any spirit of evil possessed her. She meanwhile sank on her knees before him, saying after him all the sacred words he uttered, praising God, and protesting that in her heart she wished well to the whole world. At the last the priest turned him towards the knight.

"Sir Bridegroom," quoth he, "I will leave thee alone with her to whom I have united thee in holy wedlock So far as my wisdom may lead me, I find nothing of evil in her, though much that is strange and mysterious. I commend to thee three things wherewith thou mayest bear thyself well in thy future life—Prudence, Love, and Faithfulness." With these words the priest left the room, and the fisherman and his wife followed him, crossing themselves as they passed Undine.

Undine herself had sunk on her knees. She took

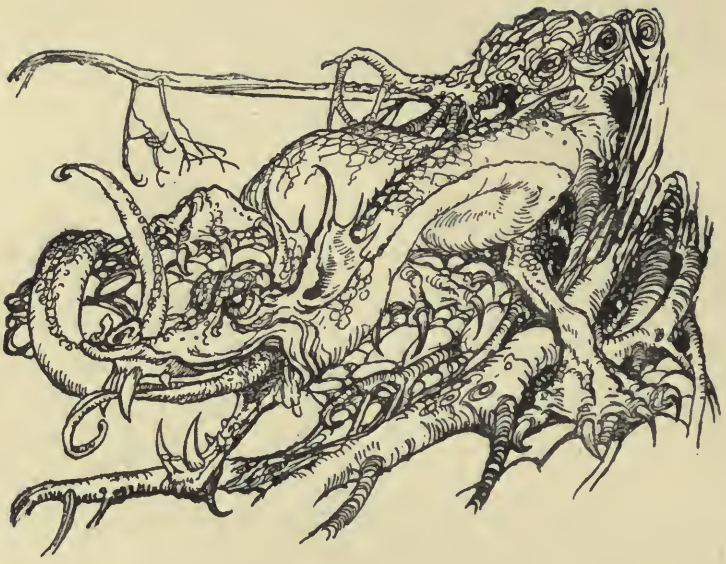
the raiment from her face, and, looking humbly and timidly on Huldbrand, spake as follows: "Woe be it to me, for thou wilt surely refuse to keep me as thine own! And yet no evil have I done, God wotteth, and am naught but an unhappy child." And as she said these words her face had on it a look so tender and so wistful in its humility and beauty that her bridegroom clean forgot all the horror he had felt, and all the mystery that surrounded her, and, hastening to her side, he raised her in his arms. She smiled through her tears. It was a smile like the light of dawn playing on a little stream.

"Ah, thou canst not leave me," she whispered, stroking the knight's cheek with her tender hand.

Sir Huldbrand did his best to banish the thoughts of fear and dread that lurked in the background of his mind, persuading him that some fairy or some malicious and mischievous being of the spirit world had come to be his wife. Only the single question, half unawares, passed his lips: "Undine, my little Undine," quoth he, "tell me at least this one thing. What was all thy talk of spirits of the earth, and of Kühleborn, what time the priest was knocking at the door?"

"Naught but fairy-tales," answered Undine merrily, "children's fairy-tales. At the first I frighted you with them, and then you frighted me. And that is the end of our story, and of our wedding-night."

"Nay, God be my witness," quoth the knight, "certès, it is not the end." Saying thus, he blew out the tapers, and by the light of the moon, which shone softly in at the window, he bore, with a thousand eager kisses, his beloved to her room



CHAPTER VIII

THE DAY AFTER THE WEDDING

The bright morning light awoke the pair: Undine hid her face beneath the bed-coverings, while Huldbrand lay for a moment in silent thought. So oft as he had slept during the night, strange and marvellous visions had disturbed his rest: spectres, grinning mysteriously, had striven to disguise themselves as beautiful women; beautiful women had taken upon themselves the form of dragons: and when he started up from these hideous dreams, the moon shone pale and cold into the room, and in terror he looked at Undine in whose arms he had fallen to sleep. But lo,

there she lay at his side, unchanged in loveliness and grace. Whereupon he would press a light kiss on her rosy lips and would fall again to sleep, only to be awakened by new terrors. Now that he was fully awake, he bethought himself of all this and blamed himself full sore for every doubt that had turned him against his sweet wife. He begged her to pardon his unjust suspicions; but for her part she only held out to him her hand and, sighing deeply, said not a word. Nathless she looked at him with a tender yearning such as he had never seen before, so that he might be certain that she bore him no manner of ill-will. With a lighter heart he rose from bed and left her to join the rest of the household in the common room.

Now the three were sitting round the hearth, with a cloud on their faces, none daring to express their fear in words. It seemed that the priest was praying in his inmost spirit that all evil might be turned aside. But as soon as they beheld the young husband come into the room with such good cheer, they put aside their trouble and anxiety; and the fisherman bethought himself to make merry jests with the knight, and so pleasantly withal that the old dame smiled, well pleased to hear them. Thereupon Undine entered the room. Now all rose to give her greeting and yet stood still a space, marvelling greatly because the young wife seemed so strange to them and yet the same. The priest first, with fatherly love in his eyes, went up to her, and as he raised his hand to

bless her, she sank on her knees before him and did him reverence. With gentle and lowly words she begged him to forgive her for all that was foolish and petulant in her speech of yestereven, and implored him with no little emotion to pray for the welfare of her soul. Then, rising from her knees, she kissed her foster-parents and gave them thanks for the goodness they had shown her.

"Ah!" quoth she, "it moveth me to my inmost soul to bethink me how great, how immeasurably great, have been your kindnesses to me, my dear, dear parents!" Nor could she at the first leave off her caresses; but when she saw the old dame bestirring herself about breakfast, she went forthwith to the hearth, cooked and prepared the meal, and would not suffer the good mother to concern herself with aught.

So she remained during the day—silent, affectionate, attentive—at once a matron, and a tender, bashful girl. The three who had known her longest, thought at every moment to see some whimsical and petulant outbreak of her old wild mood. But they looked for it in vain. Undine was as mild and gentle as an angel. The priest could not take his eyes off her, and turned ofttimes to the bridegroom.

"Sir Knight," quoth he, "the goodness of God hath through me, His unworthy servant, entrusted thee with a treasure; cherish it therefore, as is thy bounden duty, so will it be for thy welfare, both in time and in eternity."

Now, as evening fell, Undine, hanging on the knight's arm with humble tenderness, drew him gently forth from the door. Full pleasant to behold was the gleam of the setting sun on the fresh grass and the slender stems of the trees. The young wife's eyes were dewy with sadness and love, while her lips seemed to quiver with some secret mystery, at once sweet and bodeful, which might only be revealed by scarcely audible sighs. Onward and onward she led her husband and spake never a word. Indeed, when he said something, she answered not at all, but turned upon him a look in which lay a whole heaven of love and timid devotion. Thus they reached the edge of the forest stream and the knight marvelled much to see it rippling along in gentle waves, without a trace of its former wild overflow. And Undine began to speak with regret in her voice.

"By to-morrow," saith she, "it will be quite dry, and then thou mayest travel whithersoever thou wilt, without let or hindrance."

But the knight answered laughingly. "Not without thee, my little Undine," quoth he, "for bethink thee that an I wished to desert thee, church and priests, empire and emperor, would interpose and bring thee back again thy fugitive."

"Nay, but all hangs on thee," whispered she, half weeping and half smiling, "all hangs on thee! Nathless, I think that thou wilt hold by me, for that I love thee so dearly. Only carry me over to that little

island before us; the matter shall be decided there. Easily enough could I glide through the ripples; but it is so sweet to rest in thine arms, and if thou castest me off, at the least I shall have rested in them once more for the last time."

Now, Huldbrand, full as he was of wonder and fear at her words, knew not in what sort to make reply. But he took her in his arms, carrying her across, and thereupon bethought him that this was the same little island whence he had borne her back to the fisherman on the first night of his arrival. On the further side, he put her down on the soft grass, and was minded to throw himself fondly at her side. But she stayed him with a word. "Nay," quoth she, "sit there, opposite to me, I will read my sentence in thine eyes before thy lips speak. Now listen attentively, I pray thee, to what I shall say."

And she spake as followeth:

"Thou must know, my beloved, that there exist in the elements beings not unlike mortal men, which yet rarely let themselves be seen of men. Wonderful salamanders glisten and sport in the flames of fire; gnomes, lean and spiteful, dwell deep within the earth; spirits, which are of the air, wander through the forests; and a vast family of water-spirits live in the lakes and streams and brooks. In domes of crystal, echoing with many sounds, through which heaven looks in with its sun and its stars, the water-spirits find their beautiful home; lofty trees of coral with

blue and crimson fruits shine in their gardens ; they wander over the pure sand of the sea, and among lovely variegated shells and amid all the exquisite treasure of the old world, which the present world is no longer worthy to enjoy. All these the floods have covered with their mysterious veil of silver ; below sparkle, stately and solemn, many noble ruins, washed by the loving waters which win from them delicate moss-flowers and entwining clusters of sea-grass. Those who dwell there are very fair and lovely to behold—more beautiful, I ween, than human beings. Here and there a fisherman has been lucky enough to espy some mermaid as she rose from the waters and sang ; thereupon he would tell, near and far, of her beauty, and such wondrous beings have been called Undines. Thou, dear one, art actually seeing an Undine."

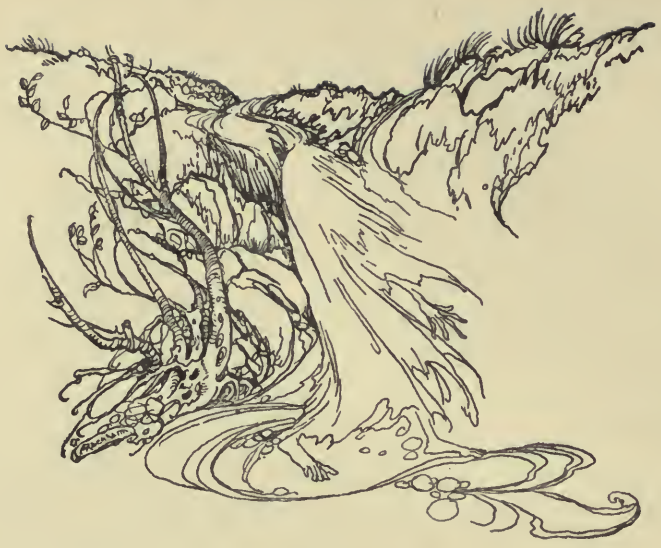
Now the knight tried hard to persuade himself that the spell of one of her strange humours was upon his wife, and that it pleased her to tease him with some extravagant fancy of her own. But albeit that he said this to himself over and over again, he persuaded himself none the better ; he shook with a strange unnatural shudder, and having no power to utter a word, stared at his companion with unmoving eyes. For her part, Undine moved her head to and fro sadly, and with a deep sigh went on as followeth :

" We should live far more happily than other human beings—for human beings we call ourselves, being

similar in face and stature—were it not for one evil that is peculiar to us. We, and our like in the other elements, vanish into dust and pass away, body and spirit, so that not a vestige of us remains behind; and when ye human beings awake hereafter to a purer life, we abide with the sand and the sparks of fire, the wind and the waves. For we have no souls. The element in which we live animates us; it even obeys us while we live; but it scatters us to dust when we die. And we are merry, having naught to grieve us—merry as are the nightingales and little gold-fishes, and other pretty children of nature. Nathless, all beings aspire to be higher than they are; and so my Father, who is a mighty water-prince in the Mediterranean Sea, was fain that his only daughter should become possessed of a soul, even though she must needs in that case endure the sufferings of those similarly endowed. Beings such as we can only gain a soul by an union of deepest love with one of thy race. A soul I now possess; and my soul thanks thee, oh my beloved, and will ever thank thee, if thou on thy part makest not my whole life wretched. For what, thinkest thou, will become of me if thou avoidest me and drivest me from thee? Still, Heaven forbid that I should hold thee to me by deceit. And if thou wilt reject me, do it forthwith and go back to the shore alone. I will plunge into this brook, which is my uncle, for here in the forest, alienated from other friends, he leads his strange and solitary life. Powerful, indeed, he is, and receiveth

tribute from many great streams; and, as he bore me to the fisherman a light-hearted and laughing child, so will he take me back again to my parents, a loving, suffering woman, gifted with a soul."

Now she was minded to say more, but Huldbrand, taking her into his arms with the tenderest love, bore her back again to the shore. Not till he had gained it, did he swear, with full many tears and kisses, never to forsake his sweet wife; and he deemed himself happier far than the heathen sculptor, Pygmalion, whose beautiful statue Venus endowed with life, so that it became his love. And Undine, clinging to his arm with sweet trustfulness, walked to the cottage, feeling now for the first time with all her heart how little need there was for her to regret the forsaken crystal palaces of her mysterious father.



CHAPTER IX

HOW THE KNIGHT BORE AWAY HIS YOUNG WIFE

Now the story here telleth how next morning Huldbrand, waking from his sleep, found not his wife by his side; and how forthwith the strange thoughts returned to his mind that his marriage, ay, and sweet Undine herself, were but delusions and sorceries. But as he mused thus, lo, Undine came into the room and sate her down beside him.

"Dear love," saith she, "I have been out betimes to see if my uncle keeps his word. And he hath already led all the waters back again into his own quiet channel, and behold he floweth once more through the

forest, lonely and dreaming, as is his wont. His friends in air and water have also gone to rest; all is again peaceful and orderly around us, and thou mayest travel homewards, when thou wilt, dryshod."

Now to Huldbrand it seemed that he was in some waking dream, and little enough could he understand the strange kindred of his wife. Nathless, he made no comment on the matter, and the exquisite grace of Undine soon lulled to rest every uneasy misgiving. When, after some space of time, he stood with her before the door, and looked over the green peninsula with its boundary of clear waters, he felt so happy in this cradle of his love that he could not forbear to say:—

"Why must we needs travel to-day? Rarely enough shall we find happier days in the world yonder than those we have spent in this quiet shelter. Nay, but let us see the sun go down here, twice or thrice more!"

"As my lord willeth," said Undine, humbly. "It is only that the old people will in any case part from me with pain, and when they now for the first time discern the true soul within me, and know how heartily I can love and honour them, methinks their aged eyes will be dimmed with many tears. At present they still hold my quietness and gentleness for nothing better than what they were once—the calm of the lake when the air is still; and, as matters now are, they will full soon learn to cherish a flower or a tree as they

have cherished me. Let me not, therefore, I beg thee, reveal to them this soul of mine, so loving and so newly-won, just at the moment when they must lose it for this world; and how can I conceal it if we remain longer together?"

Huldbrand perceived that she was right, and forthwith spoke to the old people of the journey which he proposed to undertake that very hour. The priest offered to bear company with the young pair, and so, after taking a hasty farewell, he and the knight helped the bride to mount the horse and both walked with rapid steps by her side across the dry channel of the forest stream into the wood beyond. Silently and bitterly did Undine weep, while, as for the old people, they cried aloud. It seemed that all that they were losing in their foster-child was now borne in upon their minds.

Now the three travellers had reached in silence the densest shades of the forest. Right fair was it to see how, under the green canopy of leaves, the beautiful Undine sat on the richly-caparisoned steed, while on one side walked the venerable priest in the white garb of his order, and on the other strode the knight in gay and splendid attire, girt with his sword. Huldbrand had no eyes save for his wife. Undine, who had dried her tears, had no eyes save for him. Full soon there was naught between them but a mute converse of glance and gesture, from which they were roused at length by the low talk of the priest with a fourth traveller, who, meantime, had joined them unobserved.

He was clad in a white garment, almost like the habit of the monk, only that the hood hung low over his face; and his raiment with its vast folds floated round him in such sort that ever and anon he must needs gather it up and throw it over his arm or dispose of it in some fashion, albeit that in no way did it let or hinder his movements. When the young couple first became aware of his presence, he was speaking as followeth:

"Sir Priest," quoth he, "for many years have I dwelt thus in the forest and yet no hermit am I, in the proper sense of the word. For, as I have said, of penance I know naught, nor do I think myself to have any special need of it. I love the forest in that it hath a beauty peculiar to itself; and it pleaseth me well to pass in my white flowing garments midmost the leaves and dusky shadows, while here and there a sweet sunbeam cometh upon me unawares."

"Thou art a strange man," saith the priest, "and full willingly would I know thee better."

"And to pass from one thing to another," returned the stranger, "what sort of man art thou?"

"Father Heilmann am I called," quoth the priest, "and I come from the monastery of Our Lady beyond the lake."

"Indeed," was the reply, "my name is Kühleborn, and, so far forth as courtesy requireth, I might claim the title of Lord Kühleborn or Free-lord Kühleborn; for free am I as the birds of the forest, perchance

somewhat freer. For example, I have a word to say to the lady there."

And, ere they saw what he would be at, he was on the other side of the priest, hard by Undine. He raised himself up to whisper something in her ear, but she turned away with alarm, and cried out "Nothing more have I to do with thee!"

"Ho, ho," laughed the stranger, "hast made so grand a marriage that no longer thou recognisest thy relations? Hast forgotton thy uncle Kühleborn, who so faithfully bore thee on his back to this region?"

"Nathless I beg of thee," quoth Undine, "not to appear to me again. I fear thee now. What if my husband were to learn to avoid me, when he seeth me in such strange company and with such relations!"

"Little niece," saith Kühleborn, "forget not that I am here with thee as a guide—else might the malicious goblins of the earth play some stupid pranks with thee. Let me therefore go on quickly at thy side. The old priest had better memory for me than thou hast, for he told me that I seemed familiar to him and that perchance I was with him in the boat, out of which he fell into the water. In sooth was I, for I was the waterspout that threw him out of it and washed him safely ashore for thy bridals."

Undine and the knight turned then to Father Heilmann, but he seemed walking as it were in a dream, and perceived naught of what was passing. Thereupon said Undine to Kühleborn, "Lo! there I see

"Little niece," said Kühleborn, "forget not that I am here with thee as a guide"

" Little sister," said Kibbleborn, " I forget not that
I can bear with thee as a grade "

Arthur Rackham. 1909.

the end of the forest. No need have we of thy help, and 'tis only thou who scarest us. I beg thee, therefore, in all love and goodwill, vanish and leave us in peace."

But Kühleborn was angered thereat, his face grew hideous, and right fiercely did he gnash his teeth at Undine, who screamed aloud and called on her husband for help. Quick as lightning the knight sprang to the other side of the horse and aimed a stout blow with his sword at Kühleborn's head. But the blade struck against a waterfall, which was rushing down near them from a lofty crag, and with a splash, which sounded almost like a burst of laughter, it poured over them and drenched them to the skin. Whereat the priest of a sudden woke from his dream: "Long since," quoth he, "have I been expecting something of the sort, for the stream ran down from the heights so close to us. At the first, methought it was really a man and could speak with human voice."

Now, as the waterfall rushed down, it distinctly spoke to Huldbrand's ear in words like these:

Rash knight,
Brave knight,
I am not wroth,
Nor will I chide.
But ever guard, whate'er betide,
Thy wife as closely at thy side:
Brave knight,
Rash knight!

A few steps more and they were upon open ground. Bright shone the imperial city before them, and the evening sun, which gilded its towers, dried with its kindly beams the drenched garments of the travellers.

CHAPTER X

HOW THEY FARED IN THE CITY

For a time the story must go back somewhat and tell all that had chanced in the imperial city while Huldbrand was away in the forest. The sudden disappearance of the master of Ringstetten had indeed caused great marvel and solicitude amongst those who liked him well enough for his skill at the tourney and dance, and still more for his gentle manners and bearing. His servants were not minded to leave the place without their lord, albeit that not one of them might dare to seek him in the shades of the dreaded forest. Idle therefore they remained, idly hoping, as men will do in such case, and reminding themselves of their lost master by their outspoken sorrow. Now when full soon they were ware of the storms and floods in all their violence, they the less doubted that Huldbrand was now irretriev-

ably lost; and Bertalda mourned for him openly, blaming herself in no small measure for that she had tempted the ill-starred knight to his fatal ride. Her foster-parents, the duke and the duchess, had come to fetch her away; but Bertalda begged them to remain with her until sure news should arrive of Huldbrand's life or death. Several young knights, who courted her full eagerly, she sought to persuade to follow the gallant adventurer into the forest. But no pledge would she give of her hand as reward for the enterprise. She ever hoped that Huldbrand might return and claim her; while, as for her suitors, not one of them cared to risk his life to fetch back so dangerous a rival for the sake of glove or ribbon or even kiss.

And now, look you, Huldbrand suddenly appeared! Great was the joy of his servants and the citizens. Almost every one was glad at his return, save only Bertalda. It might indeed please the others that Huldbrand should bring with him so beautiful a bride, together with Father Heilmann as witness of the marriage; but Bertalda could feel naught but grief and vexation. For, in the first place, she had really loved the knight with all her heart, and, in the second place, her sorrow at his absence had proclaimed her love in the public eye far more than was now becoming. Nathless, in such circumstances, she demeaned herself as a wise maiden, and bore herself in most friendly sort towards Undine—whom, indeed, all men thought to be a princess, rescued by Huldbrand in the forest from

some evil enchantment. If questioned on such a matter, both husband and wife were wise enough to hold their peace, or dexterously evaded the inquiry. And Father Heilmann's lips were sealed to idle gossip of any kind; moreover, immediately after Huldbrand's arrival, he had taken his way back to his monastery. Hence it came that every one must needs be content with his own conjectures, and even Bertalda knew no more of the truth than the rest.

Now, day by day, Undine felt her affection grow for the fair maiden. "Certès, we must have known one another before," she was wont to say, "or else there must be some strange tie between us, for without some cause—some deep and secret cause—one loveth not another so dearly as I have loved you from the first moment of our meeting."

Nor could Bertalda herself deny but that she was drawn to Undine in sympathy and love, for all that she might hold herself aggrieved at so successful a rival. And so strong was this mutual affection that they both persuaded—the one her foster-parents, the other her husband—to postpone the day of departure from time to time: indeed, there was some talk that Bertalda should bear Undine company to the castle of Ringstetten, near the sources of the Danube.

Of this plan they spoke to one another one evening, as they walked by starlight in the public square of the imperial city, under the tall trees that encircle it. The young husband and wife had begged Bertalda to

join them in their evening walk, and the three paced to and fro under the dark blue sky, now and again interrupting their talk to admire the magnificent fountain in the middle of the square, as its waters rushed and bubbled forth in strange beauty. Full happy and peaceful was the scene; glimmering lights from the neighbouring houses stole in upon them through the branches of the trees; a low murmur of children at play and folk who took pleasure in their walk, sounded in their ears; alone they seemed and yet not alone, in the midst of a bright, living world; the difficulties of the day smoothed themselves away; and the three friends could no longer understand what hindrance or objection there might be to Bertalda's visit to Ringstetten. Whereupon, as they were about to fix the day for their departure together, lo, a tall man, coming to them from the middle of the square, bowed with deep respect to the company, and said some words in the ear of the young wife. It irked her that she should be thus interrupted and by a stranger, but she went some steps aside with him and both began to whisper together, as it seemed, in a foreign tongue.

Now Huldbrand thought that he recognised the man, and stared so fixedly at him that he neither heard nor answered Bertalda's astonished questions. Of a sudden, Undine clapped her hands joyously and, laughing, left the stranger, while he, shaking his head, went away hastily as though ill-pleased, and vanished in the fountain. Then Huldbrand was

certain that he was right; but Bertalda addressed herself to Undine.

"Tell me," quoth she, "what had the master of the fountain to say to thee?"

And Undine laughed to herself as she made reply. "The day after to-morrow, dear one, on thy birthday, shalt thou know all." No more would she say; but she asked Bertalda and, through her, her foster parents to dine with her husband and herself on the appointed day, and soon after they parted.

"Kühleborn, was it Kühleborn?" said Huldbrand, with a secret shudder, when they had taken leave of Bertalda, and were pacing homewards through the darkening streets.

"Ay, 'twas he," quoth Undine. "And he was minded to say many foolish things to me. But in the midst, and quite against his will, he gave me a most welcome piece of news. An thou wouldst wish to hear it forthwith, dear lord and husband, thou hast but to command, and I will tell it to thee with all my heart. But if thou wilt give a real pleasure to thy Undine, wait till the day after to-morrow and then thou too, wilt have a share in the surprise."

Full readily did the knight grant to her the boon that she had so sweetly asked; and as she fell asleep, she murmured to herself with a smile. "Dear, dear Bertalda!" quoth she. "How glad she will be, and how great will be her wonder at what the master of the fountain revealed to me!"

CHAPTER XI

BERTALDA'S BIRTHDAY

HERE beginneth the story of the feast of Bertalda's name-day, how it fared for those who took part in it and in what sort it ended.

Now the company were sitting at dinner, and Bertalda, who shone like some goddess of spring with her flowers and her jewels given her by her foster-parents and friends, was placed between Undine and Huldbrand. When the rich repast was ended, and the last course had been served, the doors remained open, as the good old German custom hath it, so that the common people might look on and bear a part in the festivity of the nobles. Servants were bearing cake and wine among the spectators. Huldbrand and Bertalda, for their part, waiting with scarce-concealed impatience till the secret might be divulged, kept their eyes fixed on Undine. Silent, however, she still remained; only that now and again she smiled to herself in her hidden joy. Those who knew of the

Bertalda

Arthur Rackham '99

promise she had made, might espy well enough that she was ever on the point of making the revelation, and that it was only by a sort of gay self-denial that she repressed her longing, as children are wont to do when they defer to the last their choicest dainties. Bertalda and Huldbrand shared this delightful feeling, looking forward with impatient hope to Undine's message. Just at that moment some of the guests pressed Undine to sing. The time was opportune, and when her lute had been brought to her, she sang as followeth:

Fair was the morn and gay the flowers,
The grasses sweet and tall:
But there on the verge of the glassy lake
Was a pearl outshining all.

What glitters there amid the grass?
A blossom white as snow?
Or is it a gem of Heavenly light
Fallen to earth below?

'Tis an infant child, so frail and dear,
And while it dreams it plays
With rosy buds and happy flowers,
And grasps the morning rays.

Ah, whence, poor stranger, art thou here
From far and unknown strand?
The waves of the lake have borne thee on
To an unfamiliar land.

Nay put not forth, O little child,
Thy tiny hands outspread:
No answering hand will meet thine own
Voiceless that flowery bed.

The flowers may deck themselves full sweet,
And sweetly scent the air;
But none can press thee to its heart
With the love of a mother's care.

So early at the gate of life
Has dawned an orphan's lot;
The highest blessing thou hast missed
And yet thou know'st it not.

A noble duke comes riding by,
And stops, beholding thee:
He takes thee to his castle-halls,
A maid of high degree.

Great is the boon and great thy gain,
Thou'rt fairest in the land:
Yet, ah, the purest joy of all
Is lost—on an unknown strand!

With a sad smile Undine let fall her lute, and the eyes of Bertalda's foster-parents filled full of tears.

"Ay, ay," quoth the duke, "'twas so indeed that I found thee, my poor orphan," and he seemed deeply moved; "the fair singer says truly. The purest joy of all we have had no power to give thee!"

"But now listen," said Undine, "for we must hear how it fared with the poor parents." Thereat she struck the strings and sang as followeth:

The mother wanders through the house:
Wherever she might come,
She seeks with tears she knows not what,
And finds an empty home.

An empty home! oh, word of woe
To one that had been blest:
Who held her child throughout the day
And cradled it to rest!

The beech is growing green again,
The sun shines on the shore;
But, mother, fruitless is thy search,
Thy babe comes back no more!

And when the breath of eve blows cool
And father home returns,
He tries to smile as he smiled of yore,—
But a tear his eyelid burns.

For him his hearth is desolate
And he finds but blank despair;
For he hears the wail of that mother pale
And no child to greet him there!

"Ah, in Heaven's name," cried Bertalda through her tears, "tell me, Undine, I pray thee, where are my parents? For surely thou must know; surely thou must have discovered; for else thou wouldst not so have torn my heart! Perchance they are here? Can it be so?" Her eyes glanced quickly over the brilliant company and rested on a lady of high rank who was seated hard by her foster-father.

But Undine turned her towards the door and her eyes shone with tender light. "Where, then," quoth she, "are the poor parents who have waited so long?" Whereupon, look you, 'twas the old fisherman and eke his wife, who stepped hesitatingly forth from the crowd of spectators! They looked, and there was

much question in their looks—first at Undine and then on the beautiful maiden said to be their daughter.

"Ay, 'tis she," murmured Undine, "'tis she, indeed!" And the two old people flung their arms round the neck of their long-lost child, weeping sore and praising God.

But little pleasure, I wis, did Bertalda gain therefrom. Angry and astonished, she tore herself from their embrace. A discovery such as this was more than her proud spirit could bear at a moment when she had fondly dreamed that still greater fortune was to be her lot—nay that she might come even to royal honours. Her rival, it seemed to her, had devised this plan so that she might be all the more signally humiliated before Huldbrand and the whole world. Undine she covered with reproaches; the old people she reviled; and bitter, hateful words, such as "liar," "deceiver," "bribed impostors," fell from her lips. Thereupon the old fisherman's wife said to herself in a low voice: "Ah me, she is become, I ween, a wicked girl, and yet I feel in my heart that she was born of me." As for the fisherman, he folded his hands and prayed silently that it might not be his daughter. Undine, pale as death, turned from the parents to Bertalda and from Bertalda to the parents. From the heaven of happiness of which she had dreamed she was of a sudden cast out, and such anguish and terror as she had never known even in dreams overwhelmed her thoughts.

"Hast thou a soul?" cried she, "hast thou indeed

a soul, Bertalda?" She uttered these words over and over again as though to rouse her, despite her wrath, from some sudden madness or distracting nightmare. But when Bertalda only grew the hotter in her anger, while the parents whom she had rejected began to utter loud lamentation, and the guests, in eager dispute, took this side or that in the controversy, Undine asked with such dignity and seriousness to be allowed to speak in this, her husband's hall, that all were forthwith silenced. Then she moved to the upper end of the table, where Bertalda had sate her down; and, while every eye was fixed upon her, she spoke with modesty and pride the words that follow:

"My friends," quoth she, "I see that ye are troubled and angry, and truly, God wot, ye have marred my happy feast with your bickerings. But in sooth I know naught of your foolish ways and your harsh thoughts; nor indeed am I fain through all my life to become acquainted with them. No fault is it of mine that the matter hath turned out so ill; but, believe me an ye will, the fault may very well be with you, little as it so appears. Wherefore I have little to say; but one thing I must say. I have spoken naught but the truth. I cannot, nor I will not, give ye proof beyond these words of mine, but I declare it to be so. He told me of it, who lured Bertalda from her parents into the water, and who afterwards placed her on the green meadow in the duke's path."

"She is a sorceress!" cried Bertalda, "a witch

who holdeth intercourse with evil spirits! Why, she confesseth it herself!"

"Nay, not so," quoth Undine, and a heaven of innocence and truth was in her eyes. "I am no witch: only look at me."

"False is she," saith Bertalda, "false and boastful. Nor can she prove that I am the child of these base-born people. My noble parents, I ask ye to take me from this company, and from this city, where they are only minded to bring me to shame." Nathless, the duke's sense of honour forbade him to move, while his wife was as firm as he.

"We must be careful," said she, "how we act. God forbid that we should take a step from this hall without due thought."

Thereupon the fisherman's wife drew near, and curtseying low to the duchess, she said these words: "Thou hast opened my heart, noble lady, for thou fearest God. If this wicked child be in sooth my daughter, I must tell thee that she hath a mark, like a violet, between her shoulders, and another like it on the instep of her left foot. If she will but come with me out of the hall——"

"I shall not bare myself before a peasant woman," cried Bertalda, turning proudly away.

"But before me thou wilt," said the duchess, very gravely. "Follow me into yonder room, and the good old woman shall come with us."

So the three disappeared, and the others remained

"She hath a mark, like a violet, between her shoulders, and another like it on the instep of her left foot"

where they were, waiting in silence. After a time they came back. Bertalda was deadly pale.

"Right is right," said the duchess; "needs must I therefore declare that our hostess hath spoken naught but the exact truth. Bertalda is the fisherman's daughter, and that is all that it is necessary to say."

Duke and duchess went out with their adopted daughter; at a sign from the duke, the fisherman and his wife followed. The other guests departed in silence, or with secret murmurs; and Undine sank weeping into Huldbrand's arms.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THEY JOURNEYED FROM THE CITY

Now the lord of Ringstetten might well have been better pleased had the events of the day turned out otherwise; yet even so, it must needs content him that his wife should have been shown to be so good and sweet and kindly. "If a soul I have given her," he would say to himself, "'tis indeed a better one than mine own." And forthwith his only thought was to speak comfortingly to the weeping Undine, and on the following morning to leave a city, which after such events, must have become distasteful to her. No one

judged her with disfavour, it is true. From the first, something of strangeness and mystery was looked for in her, and the discovery of Bertalda's birth caused no great wonderment; moreover, every one who had heard the story and seen how distempered was Bertalda's behaviour, felt disgust at her alone. Of this, however, the knight and his lady knew nothing as yet. Praise or blame was alike painful to Undine, and there was therefore naught better to be done than leave the old walls of the city behind them with all possible speed.

At early dawn, a well-appointed carriage drove up to the entrance gate for Undine. Huldbrand's horses and those of his attendant squires were pawing the ground in the court. The knight was leading his wife from the door, when a fisher-girl crossed their way.

"We need not thy merchandise," said Huldbrand, "we are just leaving the city." Whereupon, as the fisher-girl began to weep bitterly, the husband and wife recognised that she was Bertalda. They went back with her at once to their apartments and learnt that the duke and duchess, bitterly displeased at her violence and ill-behaviour yesterday, had withdrawn their protection from her, albeit that they had given her a rich dowry. The fisherman, also, had been handsomely rewarded, and with his wife had already set out for their lonely home.

"I would fain have gone with them," she went on, "but the old man who is said to be my father——"

"He is truly thy father," Undine broke in. "Listen. The stranger who appeared to thee to be the master of the fountain told me the whole story, word for word. He wished to dissuade me from taking thee to Castle Ringstetten, and so the secret came out."

"Well, then," said Bertalda, "my father, if so it must be —my father refused to take me with him until such time as I might be changed in nature and dress. 'Adventure thyself alone through the haunted forest,' quoth he; 'that shall be the proof whether thou hast any regard for us or no. But come not as a lady; come as a fisher-girl.' Now I would do as he said, for I am forsaken by the whole world, and I will live and die alone with my poor parents as a poor fisher-girl. But I dread the forest. Hideous spectres dwell there and make me afraid. But there is no help for it. I came here but to implore pardon of the noble lady of Ringstetten for that I demeaned myself so unworthily yesterday. I know well, gentle lady, that you meant to do me a kindness; but you knew not how you would wound me, and in my distress and surprise, full many a rash and frantic word escaped my lips. Ah, forgive me, forgive me, I am so unhappy! Bethink thyself what I was yesterday morning—yesterday when your feast began—and what I am now!"

Her voice was choked with a burst of passionate tears, and Undine, who also wept full sore, fell on her neck. It was long before she could utter a word; at length she said:

"Truly thou canst go with us to Ringstetten," quoth she. "Everything shall be as before arranged. Only, I beg thee, do not call me 'noble lady.' Look you, we were exchanged as children—that made our destinies akin; and we will now so closely link our destinies together that no power of man shall be able to sever them. Only, first of all, come to Ringstetten; there can we discuss how to share everything as sisters." Bertalda raised her eyes timidly to Huldbrand. As for him, he pitied the beautiful girl in her distress, gave her his hand and begged her in all kindness to trust herself to him and his wife.

"We will send a message to your parents," quoth he, "to tell them why you have not come"; and he would have added further words about the good old couple, had he not seen that Bertalda shrank from the mention of their name. He therefore said no more.

Thereupon he helped her into the carriage; Undine followed; while he, mounting his horse and trotting gaily by their side, urged the coachman to drive with all convenient speed. Full soon they were beyond the confines of the imperial city and all its painful recollections, and the ladies could now begin to enjoy the beautiful country through which their road lay.

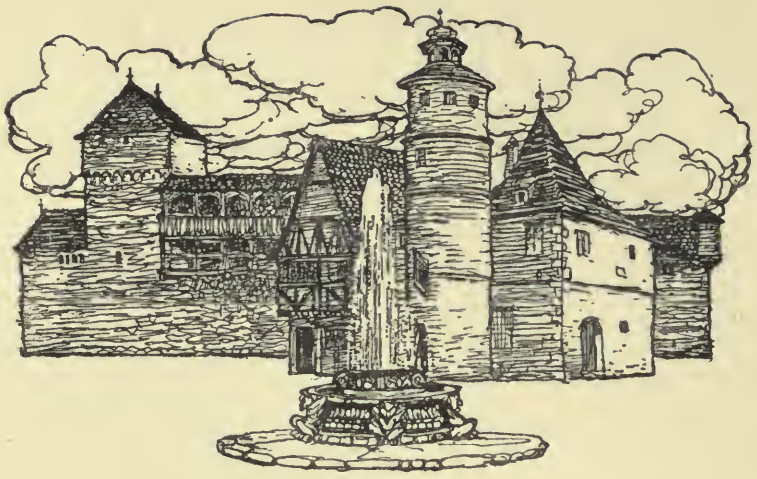
After a few days journey they came one exquisite evening to Castle Ringstetten. The knight had much business to transact with his steward and with his other retainers, so that Undine and Bertalda

were left alone. Both went out on the ramparts of the fortress and were delighted with the fair landscape that spread far and wide before them through fertile Swabia. At that moment a tall man approached them, greeting them courteously, and it seemed to Berthalda that he bore a likeness to the master of the fountain in the city. Still stronger grew the resemblance, as Undine, indignantly and with threatening gesture, bade him begone, and he departed with hasty steps, shaking his head as before, and vanishing at last in a thicket close by. But Undine reassured her friend.

"Do not be afraid, dear Bertalda," she said, "this time that hateful master of the fountain shall do no harm." And then she told the whole story in detail—who she was herself, and how Bertalda had been taken away from the fisherman and his wife, and Undine brought to them instead. At first the girl was frightened, for she thought her friend to be seized with sudden madness. But soon she felt more and more convinced that all was true, because Undine's story held together so well, and suited so aptly past events. Moreover, truth is truth, and brings its own testimony. It seemed, indeed, strange to Bertalda that she should be living, as it were, in the midst of one of those fairy tales, to which formerly she had but lent an ear.

Full reverently did she gaze upon Undine, but always with a sense of dread that came between her

and her friend. At their evening meal she could not help but marvel that the knight could bear himself with such tenderness and love towards a being who now, after all she had discovered, appeared to be a phantom rather than a human being.



CHAPTER XIII

HOW THEY FARED AT CASTLE RINGSTETTEN

Now the story is silent concerning some events, and only mentioneth others cursorily ; while it passeth over a considerable space of time. And for this he who reads the tale must pardon him that wrote it, the reason being that the writer is himself moved by the sadness of it, and would fain have others touched likewise. He could, an he willed it, portray—for perchance he hath the skill—how, step by step, Huldbrand's heart began to turn from Undine to Bertalda ; how Bertalda more and more answered devotion by devotion ; how both looked upon the wife as a mysterious being to fear rather than to pity ; how Undine wept, and how her tears stirred the knight's remorse without awakening

his old love—in such sort that, though at times he was kind and affectionate, a cold shudder would soon drive him from her and make him turn to his fellow mortal, Bertalda. All this, the writer knoweth full well, might be drawn out at length ; mayhap, it ought so to be ; but it grieveth him overmuch, for he hath known such things by sad experience, and he dreadeth even the shadow of their remembrance. And thou, too, who readest these pages, art like to have had a similar knowledge, for such is the lot of man. Happy art thou if thou hast felt the pain, rather than caused it; for in such things 'tis more blessed to receive than to give. If so it be, such a memory will give thee sorrow, and a tear, perchance, may fall on the faded flowers which once thou wert wont to prize. But enough of this. We will not pierce our hearts with a thousand separate stings, but be content to know that matters were so as I have stated them.

Now poor Undine was sad, and the others in no better case. Bertalda in especial thought she detected an injured wife's jealousy whenever her wishes were thwarted. For this reason it was her wont to bear herself imperiously, and Undine gave way sorrowfully ; while as for Huldbrand, his blindness was such that he encouraged Bertalda in her arrogance. Moreover, the peace of the castle was still further disturbed by many apparitions, strange and marvellous, which met Huldbrand and Bertalda in the vaulted galleries, and these had never been heard of before in the memory

of man. The tall white man, whom the knight knew only too well as Uncle Kühleborn, and Bertalda as the spectral master of the fountain, often passed before them with threats in his eye. It was Bertalda whom he especially menaced—so much so that many times she had been sick with terror, and often bethought her of leaving the castle. But Huldbrand was all too dear ; and she trusted to her innocence, sith no words of love had passed between them. Besides, she knew not whither to go.

Now you must know that the old fisherman, when he received the message from the lord of Ringstetten that Bertalda was his guest, had written a few words in an almost illegible hand—such words as in his old age, and his want of experience, it would be natural for him to write.

" I am now," he wrote, " a widower : my dear and faithful wife is dead. Nathless, though I be lonely in my cottage, I would rather that Bertalda were with thee than with me. Only let her do no harm to my beloved Undine—on pain of my curse."

The last words Bertalda flung to the winds; but she paid especial attention to the part concerning her absence from her father. We are all wont to do the like in similar circumstances.

It happened one day, when Huldbrand had just ridden forth, that Undine called together the servants of the household. She bade them bring a large stone and carefully cover with it the magnificent fountain,

which was in the midst of the castle court. The servants urged that this would oblige them to fetch water from far down in the valley. Undine smiled sadly.

"Full sorry am I, friends," quoth she, "to increase your labour. I would rather carry the pitchers with my own hands. But this fountain must be closed. Believe me, there is no other way of escaping a much greater evil."

Well pleased, I ween, were the whole household to do anything for their gentle mistress. They asked no more questions, but took up the enormous stone. Already they had raised it in their hands, and were poising it over the fountain, when, lo, Bertalda came up running, and ordered them to stop. It was from this fountain that the water came which was so good for her complexion, and, for her part, said she: "I will never allow it to be closed." Undine, however, despite her usual gentleness, was firmer than her wont. She told Bertalda that it was her business, as mistress of the house, to make such arrangements as she thought best, and that in this she was accountable only to her lord and husband.

"Nay, but look," cried Bertalda, angry and displeased, "look how the poor water curls and writhes! It cannot bear to be shut out from the bright sunshine and the cheerful look of human faces which it loveth to mirror!"

And, in sooth, the water bubbled and hissed full

strangely; it was as though there were something within which strove to release itself; but Undine only the more earnestly insisted that her orders should be carried out. There was no need to urge; the servants were as glad to obey their gentle mistress as they were to thwart Bertalda's self-will; and despite all her rude and angry threats, the stone was soon firmly fixed over the opening of the fountain. Thereupon Undine bent thoughtfully over it, and wrote something on its surface. It would seem that she held a sharp and cutting instrument in her hand, for when she had gone and the servants came near to examine the stone, they saw various strange characters upon it which none had seen before.

Now, when the knight returned home in the evening, Bertalda received him with tears and complaints of Undine's conduct. Huldbrand looked hard and cold at his wife, and she cast down her eyes in distress. Yet she made answer calmly enough.

"My lord and husband," said she, "doth not reprove even a bond slave without hearing; how much less his wedded wife?"

"Speak," said the knight, with a stern face, "what moved thee to act so strangely?"

"I fain would tell thee when we are alone," sighed Undine.

"Thou mayest tell me just as well in Bertalda's presence," he returned.

"Ay," quoth Undine, "if such be thy command.

But command it not, I beseech thee." She looked so humble, so sweet, so obedient, that a gleam from better times shone in the knight's heart. He took her with some show of tenderness by the hand and led her within to an inner room, where she began to speak as followeth :

" My beloved lord," saith she, " knoweth somewhat of my evil uncle, Kühleborn, and it hath displeased him more than once to meet him in the galleries of the castle. Several times hath Kühleborn frightened Bertalda and made her ill. This is because he is devoid of soul ; he is an elemental force, a mere mirror of external things, without ability to reflect the world within. Now at times he seeth that thou art displeased with me ; that I, in my childlike way, am crying ; and that Bertalda is perhaps at the same moment laughing. Hence he imagineth various unlikely jars and troubles in our home life, and in many ways mixeth himself unbidden with our circle. What avails it that I reprove him, that I send him angrily away? He doth not believe a word I say. His undeveloped nature can give him no idea how sweetly the joys and sorrows of love resemble one another, how closely and inseparably they are united. Why, tears beget smiles, and from their hidden source smiles conjure up tears ! "

She looked up at Huldbrand, smiling and weeping, and once more he felt within him all the enchantment of his old love. She was aware of this and pressed him closer to her, as she went on more happily :

"As the disturber of our peace was not to be dismissed with words, I have had to shut the door upon him, and the only door by which he can enter is that fountain. He is at variance with all the water-spirits of the adjacent valleys, and his dominion only beginneth again far down the Danube, to which some of his good friends are tributaries. 'Twas for this reason that I had the stone placed over the opening of the fountain, and I inscribed characters on it which cripple all my jealous uncle's power in such sort that he can come neither in thy way, nor mine, nor Bertalda's. Now it is true that ordinary men can raise the stone again with but common effort, for all that it is marked with strange characters. They are not let or hindered by the inscription. If it be thy will, therefore, comply with Bertalda's desire; but in truth she knoweth not what she asketh. On her, above all, the rude Kühleborn hath set his mark; and if that came to pass which he hath predicted to me, and which might well enough happen without any evil intention on thy part—thou thyself, beloved one, wouldst not be safe from peril!"

Huldbrand felt deeply how generous had been his wife in her eagerness to shut up her formidable champion, albeit that she had been upbraided therefor by Bertalda. Folding her most tenderly in his arms he said with obvious sincerity, "The stone shall remain, and all shall remain, as thou wilt have it, now and ever, my sweet Undine." Timidly and fondly she kissed

him in this re-awakening of a love so long withheld; and at the last she said:

"Dearest husband," quoth she, "so gentle and kind art thou to-day that I would fain ask a favour of thee. See now, it is the same with thee as it is with summer. In the height of its glory, summer puts on its flaming and thundering crown of storms, so as to prove that it is a king over the earth. And thou, too, sometimes, art angry, and thine eyes flash and thy voice stormeth; and these things become thee well, though they make me in my folly weep. But never, I pray thee, behave thus on the water or even near it, for in that case my kinsfolk would regain power over me. They would tear me irrevocably from thy arms, deeming that one of their race was injured; and then I must needs dwell all my life below in the crystal palaces, never daring to come up to thee again; or else they would send me up to thee, and that, O Heaven, would be infinitely worse! No, no, beloved one, let it not come to this, if poor Undine be dear to thee!"

Full solemnly he gave the promise to do as she desired, and both left the room, full of love and gladness. As they came forth, lo, Bertalda appeared with some workmen to whom she had already given orders, and in the sullen tone she had assumed of late, said: "The secret conference, methinks, is over at last. I suppose the stone may now be removed; go ye men, and see that it be done."

But the knight, incensed at her forwardness, gave

orders, shortly and decisively, that the stone should be left where it was ; and he uttered some reproof likewise to Bertalda for her behaviour towards his wife. Whereupon the workmen went away, smiling and well-satisfied ; and Bertalda, pale with rage, hurried to her room.

The hour of supper arrived and, behold, they waited in vain for Bertalda. They sent to summon her, but the servant found her room empty and only brought back a sealed letter addressed to the knight. He opened it in some amazement and read as follows : "I am but a fisher-girl—I know it well ; and shame holdeth me fast. If I forgot it for a moment, I will atone by going to the miserable cottage of my parents Live happy with thy beautiful wife ! "

Now Undine was much distressed thereat : and she earnestly begged Huldbrand to hasten after their friend and bring her back. Alas, there was no need to urge ! His love for Bertalda burst out anew. Hurrying round the castle, he inquired if any had seen which way the fugitive had gone. Naught could he learn, and he was already on his horse in the castle-yard, resolved at a venture to take the road by which he had brought Bertalda hither, when, of a sudden, a page came up and assured him that he had met the lady on the path to the Black Valley. Like an arrow, the knight sped through the gateway in the direction pointed out to him ; nor did he hear Undine's voice of agony, as she called to him from the window : "The

Black Valley! Oh, go not there, Huldbrand, go not there! or else, for Heaven's sake, take me too!" And when she saw that she cried in vain, she ordered her white palfrey to be saddled forthwith, and rode after the knight. Nor did she permit any servant to accompany her.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BLACK VALLEY

Now the Black Valley lieth deep within the mountains. What name it may bear now I know not; at that time the country people gave it this title because of the deep gloom that the tall trees, chiefly fir-trees, threw over the ravine. Even the brook bubbling between the rocks had a black look, and was far less joyous in its flow than streams that have the blue sky over them. And now, in the darkening twilight, it ran yet more wild and gloomy beneath the hills.

With no little anxious care the knight rode along the edge of the brook; at one moment he feared that by delay he might allow the fugitive to get too far in advance, and at the next, that in his overhaste he might pass her by in some hiding-place. He had meanwhile penetrated far into the valley and hoped soon to win his quest, if so be that he were on the right track. The fear, indeed, that this might not be the case, made his heart beat fast with dread. How, he

Bertalda in the Black Valley

asked himself, might Bertalda fare, should he fail to find her, throughout the stormy night which lowered so threateningly over the valley? At length something white gleaming through the branches on the slope of the mountain caught his eye, and he thought he recognised Bertalda's dress. But when he turned in that direction his horse refused to advance and reared furiously; and the knight, because he was unwilling to lose a moment, and also because he saw that the brushwood opened no passage for him on horseback, dismounted. Fastening his snorting and terrified horse to an elm-tree, he worked his way cautiously through the bushes. On his forehead and cheeks the branches shed the cold drops of evening dew; distant thunder growled beyond the mountains; and all looked so wild that he began to feel a dread of the white figure, now lying only a short distance from him on the ground. Still right plainly he could see that it was a woman, either asleep or in a swoon, and that she wore long white robes such as Bertalda had worn that day. Close to her he stepped, rustled the branches, and let his sword fall with a clatter. She did not move.

"Bertalda!" he cried, first softly, then louder and louder. She did not hear. At last, in answer to a yet louder appeal to her name, a hollow echo from the mountain caverns repeated "Bertalda!" But the sleeper awoke not. He bent over her, but the gloom of the ravine and the darkness of coming night did not allow him to recognise her features.

And now a strange thing chanced. As with sickening dread he stooped still closer over her, a flash of lightning shot across the valley, and he saw before him a face distorted and hideous, while a hollow voice exclaimed, "Kiss me, thou love-sick fool!"

Huldbrand sprang up with a cry, and the hideous figure rose with him.

"Go home," it muttered, "unholy spirits are abroad. Go home, or I shall claim thee!" and it caught at him with its long white arms. Thereupon the knight recovered himself.

"Malicious Kühleborn," he cried, "thy tricks are vain, I know thy goblin arts. There, take thy kiss!" And he struck his sword madly against the figure. But it vanished like vapour, and a drenching spray left the knight in no manner of doubt as to who his enemy might be.

"He would fain scare me away from Bertalda," he said aloud. "Doubtless he thinks to frighten me with his foolish pranks, and to force me to abandon the helpless girl to his vengeance. But that he shall not do. Poor, weak spirit as he is, he is powerless to understand what a strong man's heart can dare, when once he is firmly resolved in purpose." He felt the truth of his words and they brought him fresh courage. Fortune herself, too, or so it seemed, was on his side, for no sooner did he reach his tethered horse than he heard, distinctly enough, Bertalda's moaning voice at

no great distance, and through the growing tumult of thunder and storm he could catch the sound of her sobs. Hurrying forthwith to the spot, he found her. She was trying to climb the side of the hill, so that she might at least escape the awful darkness of the valley. As he came with loving words towards her, all her pride and strength of resolve fainted and failed before the delight of seeing the friend, who was so dear to her, close at hand to rescue her from her terrible loneliness. "Once more," she thought, "the happy life of the castle holds out to me its arms. I can but yield." So she followed the knight unresisting, but so wearied was she that Huldbrand was right glad to have his horse to carry her. In all haste he untethered him in order to put the fugitive on his back, and thus, holding the reins with all care, he hoped to win his way through the uncertain shades of the valley.

Howbeit the wild apparition of Kühleborn had made the horse mad with terror. Scarce might the knight himself have mounted and ridden so ungovernable a beast; but to put the trembling Bertalda on him was wholly beyond his power. So they resolved, perforce, to go home on foot. Drawing the horse after him by the bridle, the knight supported Bertalda with his other hand, and she, on her part, made brave show to pass as quickly as might be through the ravine. But weariness weighed her down like lead, and her limbs trembled—partly because of the past terror she had

undergone through Kühleborn's pursuit, and partly because of her continued alarm at the howling of the storm and the pealing of the thunder in the wooded mountains.

And, at the last, she could no more. She slid down from the knight's supporting arm and sank on the moss.

"Leave me here, my noble lord," cried she; "I must needs suffer the penalty of my folly and die here in weariness and fear."

"Nay, nay, sweet friend," quoth he, "say not so, for desert thee I will not." And so saying he endeavoured all the more to curb his furious horse, who, rearing and plunging worse than before, must now be kept at some distance from Bertalda lest he might increase her discomfiture. So the knight withdrew a few paces, but no sooner had he gone than she called after him in most piteous sort as though in truth he were going to leave her in this solitary wilderness. What course to take he knew not; he was utterly at a loss. Gladly enough would he have given the excited beast his liberty to gallop away into the night and so exhaust his terror. Yet he feared that in this narrow defile he might come thundering with his iron-shod hoofs over the very spot where Bertalda lay.

Now he was in this sore distress and perplexity, when he heard with unspeakable relief the sound of a waggon driven slowly down the stony road behind

them. He called out for help ; a man's voice answered, bidding him have patience but promising assistance ; and soon after two grey horses appeared through the bushes, and beside them the driver in the white smock of a carter ; next a great white tilt came into sight covering the goods that lay in the waggon. At a sign from their master the obedient horses halted, and the waggoner coming towards the knight helped him to soothe his frightened animal.

"Full well I see," quoth he, "what aileth the beast. When I first travelled this way it fared no better with my horses. An evil water-spirit in truth haunteth the place, and he taketh delight in mischief of this sort. But I have learned a spell : if thou wilt let me whisper it in thy horse's ear, he will forthwith stand as quiet as my greys yonder."

"Try thy spell and quickly!" cried the knight impatiently. Then the man drew down to him the head of the restive horse and whispered something in his ear. Straightway the animal stood still and subdued, and his heaving flanks bedewed with sweat alone bore witness to his former fury. Huldbrand had no time to inquire how all this had come about ; he agreed with the carter that he should take Bertalda in his waggon—in which, so the man assured him, there were a quantity of soft cotton bales—and so bear her back to Castle Ringstetten. He himself was minded to follow on horseback, but the horse appeared too exhausted by his past fury to carry his master so

far, and the waggoner persuaded him to take his place beside Bertalda. The horse could be fastened behind.

"We are going down hill," said the man, "and that will be easy work for my greys." Thereupon the knight agreed and entered the waggon with Bertalda; the horse followed patiently behind, and the waggoner steadily and watchfully walked by the side.

Amid the stillness of the night, now that the darkness had fallen and the subsiding storm seemed to grow more and more remote, Huldbrand and Bertalda, in the pleasant sense of renewed security and a right happy escape, began to converse in low and confidential tones. Caressingly he rallied her on her daring flight, and she excused herself full humbly; but from every word she said there shone as it were a light which revealed amidst the darkness and mystery that her love was truly his. The meaning of her words was felt rather than heard, and it was to the meaning only that the knight responded. Of a sudden the waggoner gave a shout: "Step high, my greys," cried he; "lift up your feet! Step together and bethink ye who ye are!" The knight looked forth from the waggon and saw how the horses were stepping into the midst of a foaming stream; already they were almost swimming, while the waggon wheels turned and flashed like the wheels of a mill, and the driver had got up in front to escape the swelling waters.

"Why, what sort of road is this?" cried Huldbrand, "it goeth into the very middle of the stream!"

"By no means," said their guide, with a laugh, "it is just the reverse; the stream goeth into the very middle of our road. Look round and see how overwhelming is the flood." And, indeed, the whole valley was filled with a rushing and heaving torrent of water, which was visibly swelling higher and higher.

"'Tis Kühleborn, the evil spirit," cried the knight, "he wishes to drown us! Hast thou no spell against him, my friend?"

"Ay, ay," returned he. "I know one well enough. But I may not and cannot use it until thou knowest who I am."

"Is this a time for riddles?" shouted Huldbrand. "The flood is rising higher and higher; and what mattereth it to me who thou art?"

"Nathless, it doth matter," quoth the waggoner, "for I am Kühleborn!" Thereupon he thrust a distorted face into the waggon with a grin. But, lo and behold, the waggon was a waggon no longer! The horses were no longer horses—all melted into foam and vanished in the seething waters. Even the waggoner himself towering over them as some gigantic billow, and dragging down the horse beneath the waves despite his struggles, rose and swelled higher and higher over the drowning pair of lovers, like a mighty column of water, threatening to bury them for ever.

And then, hark, 'twas Undine's voice which rang

through the uproar ; 'twas Undine herself who, as the moon swam clear of the clouds, was seen standing on the heights above the valley. 'Twas she, in sooth, who rebuked and threatened the floods below ; and the menacing column of water vanished, murmuring and muttering, and the streams flowed gently away in the moonlight. Like a white dove Undine flew down from the height ; she laid hold on the knight and Bertalda, and bore them with her to a green and grassy spot on the hill. There she refreshed their weariness and dispelled their fears ; and when she had helped Bertalda to mount her white palfrey, they all three made their way back, as best they might, to Castle Ringstetten.

CHAPTER XV

HOW THEY JOURNEYED TO VIENNA

Now the story halteth for a space. After the last adventure all was quiet and peaceful at the castle. More and more was the knight conscious of that heavenly goodness in his wife, which had been so nobly proved in her hasty pursuit and rescue of them from the Black Valley, where Kühleborn's power began again. And Undine felt that inner peace and security which never fail the heart that knows itself to be in the right way. Besides, in the newly-awakened love and esteem of her husband, many a gleam of hope and joy shone upon her. As for Bertalda, she seemed humble, grateful, modest, without claiming any merit for such virtues. It might chance that either Huldbrand or Undine sought now and again to explain to her why the fountain was covered, or the real meaning of the Black Valley adventure; but she always earnestly begged them to spare her. "For," said she, "the fountain makes me feel ashamed,

and the Black Valley terrifies me." Naught more of either then did she learn. And, indeed, why should she? Peace and joy had visibly come to stay at Castle Ringstetten. Real security was theirs, or so they deemed—why should life produce aught but flowers and fruit?

In conditions like these winter had come and passed away, and spring with her green buds and blue sky visited the happy inmates of the castle. Spring was in tune with their hearts and their hearts with spring. What wonder then if her storks and swallows awoke in them also a wish to travel?

One day, as they were sauntering to one of the sources of the Danube, Huldbrand spoke of the majesty of the noble river, and how it flowed on, ever widening, through fertile lands; how the glory of Vienna rose on its banks, and new might and loveliness were revealed in every tract and reach of its course.

"It must be glorious to sail down the river to Vienna," exclaimed Bertalda; then falling back on her present mood of humbleness and reserve, she coloured deeply and was silent.

Undine was much touched thereby, and with an eager wish to please her friend, she said: "What hinders us from taking this voyage?" Bertalda was delighted, and forthwith both began to picture to themselves in the most glowing colours the delight of travel on the Danube. Hulbrand also gladly agreed; yet once he whispered in Undine's ear:

"But Kühleborn regains his power lower down the river!"

"Let him come," quoth Undine gaily, "I shall be there, and he tries none of his tricks before me!" Thus the last obstacle disappeared. When they had prepared themselves for the voyage, they set out with the best courage and the brightest hopes.

Howbeit, meseemeth for us mortal men there is little to marvel at, if things should turn out contrary to our hopes. The evil power which lurks to destroy us is wont to lull to sleep its chosen victim with sweet songs and golden delusions, while the saving messenger from heaven often knocks at our door with sharp and terrifying summons.

Now for the first few days of the voyage down the Danube, their cup of happiness seemed full. Everything grew more and more beautiful the farther they sailed down the proudly-flowing river. Nathless, in a country which smiled so sweetly and was so full of the promise of pure delight, lo, Kühleborn, with his ungovernable malice, began openly to show his powers of interference. It is true that he essayed naught but irritating tricks, for Undine would often rebuke the rising waves or the contrary winds, and then for an instant the power of the enemy was humbled. But the attacks began again and again. Undine's reproofs became necessary in such sort that the pleasure of the little party was completely destroyed. Moreover the boatmen were continually whispering and looking with

a certain mistrust at their passengers; while even the servants began to have forebodings and watched their masters with suspicious glances.

Huldbrand would often say to himself: "Certès, like should only wed with like; this cometh of an union with a mermaid!" And making excuses for himself, as we are all wont to do, he would bethink him: "I knew not in truth that she was a sea-maiden; mine is the misfortune that all my life is let and hindered by the freaks of her mad kindred. It is no fault of mine!" Such thoughts seemed to hearten him; yet, on the other hand, his ill-humour grew and he felt something like animosity against Undine. She, poor thing, understood well enough what his angry looks signified. One evening, exhausted with these outbursts of ill-temper, and her constant efforts to frustrate Kühleborn's devices, she fell into a deep slumber, rocked soothingly by the gentle motion of the boat.

But hardly had she closed her eyes, when every one on board saw, wherever he turned, a horrible human head. It rose out of the waves, not like that of a person swimming, but perfectly perpendicular, as though kept upright on the watery surface, and floating along in the same course as the boat. Each man wanted to point out to his fellow the cause of his alarm, but each found on other faces the same horror —only that his neighbour's hands and eyes were turned in a different direction from that where the

phantom, half laughing and half threatening, rose before him. But when they wished to make each other understand, and were all crying out "Look there!"—"No—there!" all the horrible heads together and at the same moment appeared to their view, and the whole river swarmed with hideous apparitions. The universal shriek of fear awoke Undine, and, as she opened her eyes, the wild crowd of ugly faces vanished.

But as for Huldbrand, it irked him sore to see such jugglery. He had well nigh burst out in a storm of indignation; but Undine implored him in humble and soothing tones: "For God's sake," saith she, "bethink thee, my husband! We are on the water, do not be angry with me now!" So the knight held his peace and sat down with brooding thoughts. Undine whispered in his ear. "Were it not better, my love, that we gave up this foolish voyage, and returned in peace to Ringstetten?"

But Huldbrand murmured moodily: "So I must needs be a prisoner in my own castle, and only able to breathe so long as the fountain is closed! Would that thy mad kindred——" Hereupon Undine lovingly pressed her hand on his lips; and he paused, musing in silence over much that Undine had before told him.

Meantime, Bertalda had given herself up to many strange thoughts. Much of Undine's origin she knew, and yet not everything; as to Kühleborn, he above

all had remained for her a terrible and insoluble puzzle. Indeed, she had never even heard his name. Pondering thus, she unclasped, half conscious of the act, a gold necklace which Huldbrand had recently bought for her from a travelling merchant; dreamily she drew it along the surface of the water, pleased with the bright glimmer it cast upon the evening-tinted stream. Of a sudden, a huge hand rose out of the Danube, caught hold of the necklace, and drew it down beneath the waters. Bertalda screamed aloud, and a mocking laugh echoed from the depths of the stream. And now the wrath of Huldbrand burst all bounds. Starting up, he cursed the river, cursed all those who dared to thrust themselves into his family life, and challenged them, whether water-spirits or sirens, to come and face his naked sword.

And Bertalda went on weeping for her lost and much loved toy, adding thereby fuel to the flame of the knight's anger; while Undine held her hand over the side of the vessel, dipping it into the water and softly murmuring to herself. Now and again she interrupted her strange and mysterious whisper by entreaties to her husband.

"Chide me not here, my best beloved!" she said, "Chide whom else thou wilt; but not me and here. Thou knowest why!" And, in truth, he kept back the words of anger that were trembling on his tongue. Presently in her wet hand she brought up from beneath the water a beautiful coral necklace, so beautiful and

Soon she was lost to sight in the Danube

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so brilliant that it dazzled the eyes of all who saw it. "Take this," she said, as she held it out to Bertalda. "I have had this fetched from below to make amends to thee. Do not grieve any more, my poor child!"

But the knight sprang between them. He tore the pretty trinket from Undine's hand, flung it into the river, and exclaimed in passionate rage: "So then," cried he, "thou still hast dealings with them? In the name of all the witches, abide with them, thou and thy presents, and leave us mortals in peace, sorceress!"

Poor Undine looked at him with fixed and tearful eyes, her hand still outstretched, as when she had offered her present so lovingly to Bertalda. Then she wept, ever more and more bitterly, like an innocent child who feels that it has been sorely misused. At length, wearied and outworn, she murmured: "Alas! sweet friend, I must needs bid thee farewell! They shall do thee no harm; only remain true, so that I may have the power to protect thee from them. But for myself, I must go—go hence in the springtide of my life. Oh, what hast thou done! What hast thou done! Alas! Alas!"

And so Undine vanished over the side of the vessel. Whether she plunged into the stream or was drawn into it they knew not; it might have been either or perhaps somewhat of both. But full soon she was lost to sight in the Danube; only a few little waves

seemed to whisper and sob round the boat, as though they murmured: "Alas! alas! Be faithful!"

And Huldbrand lay on the deck, weeping bitterly, till a deep swoon cast a veil of merciful oblivion over his unhappiness.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW IT FARED FURTHER WITH HULDBRAND

HEREUPON the story must again have some pause. All men know that sorrow is short-lived. But is it well or ill that it should be so? And by sorrow the writer means the deeper sort—that which springs from the very sources of life, which so unites itself with the lost objects of our love that they are no longer lost, and which consecrates their image as a sacred treasure, until that final bourn be reached which they have gained before us. Should such a sorrow as this be brief? Many men, it is true, preserve these sacred memories, but their feeling is no longer that of the first keen grief. Other new images have thronged between, and we end by learning how all earthly things are transitory, even grief itself. And for this reason must one say: "Alas! that our mourning should be of such short duration!"

Now the lord of Ringstetten had this experience sure enough—whether for his good the sequel of this story shall tell. At first he could do naught but weep, as bitterly as Undine had wept when he tore from her hand that bright trinket which was to mend all that was awry. And then he was fain to stretch out his hand as she had done, and weep again like her. It was his secret hope that his bodily frame might melt and dissolve in tears—and hath not a similar hope, God wot, appealed to many, with a sad sort of joy, what time their affliction is heavy? Nor was he alone in his grief. Bertalda wept with him, and they lived a long while quietly together at Castle Ringstetten, cherishing Undine's memory, and almost wholly forgetting their former love. And because these things were so, the good Undine often visited Huldbrand in his dreams, caressing him with many tender kisses, and then going away silently and with tears. When he woke, he scarcely knew why his cheeks were wet; were they her tears or his own?

Nathless, as time passed, these dream-visions became rarer and the knight's grief grew less acute. Still it might well have been that he would have cherished no other wish than thus to think of Undine and talk of her, had not the old fisherman appeared of a sudden one day at the castle, and solemnly claimed Bertalda once more as his child. He had heard full soon of Undine's disappearance, and he straightway had resolved that no longer should

Bertalda live at the castle, now that the knight had lost his wife. "Whether my daughter love me or no," quoth he, "concerneth me not; it is her honour that is at stake, and where that speaketh clear, there is naught further to be said."

Now when the knight learnt that the fisherman was thus minded, and when he bethought himself how lonely his life would be among the halls and galleries of the empty castle with Bertalda gone away, full soon he felt anew what until now he had forgotten in his grief for Undine—his love for the beautiful Bertalda. Certès, for a marriage thus suggested and proposed, the fisherman had but little inclination. Undine had been exceedingly dear to the old man, nor yet could he hold it for certain that she was dead. And if in sooth her body lay cold and stark at the bottom of the Danube, or had floated away with the current into the ocean, even so, on Bertalda's head for sure rested the blame for her death. How could it be seemly that she should step into the dead wife's shoes? Yet, for the knight, too, the fisherman had a strong liking; while to his daughter's prayers he must needs also pay some heed, now that she wept for the loss of Undine. For one cause or another his consent must have been given at the last, for he stayed on at the castle without making further ado. Moreover a messenger was sent for Father Heilmann. As he had made Huldbrand and Undine man and wife in happy days gone by, so now for the second marriage

of the knight 'twere seemly that he should be summoned to the castle.

Howbeit the holy man was sore perplexed when the summons arrived. So great was his distemperature that no sooner had he read Huldbrand's letter, than he girt himself for his journey with far greater expedition than the messenger had used in his coming. What time his breath failed him or his aged limbs refused their service, he would say to himself, "Fail not, body of mine, fail not till the goal be reached! Perchance I may yet be soon enough to prevent a crime!" And thus with renewed strength he would press and urge himself on, without stop or stay, until late one evening he found himself at last in the shady courtyard of Ringstetten.

Now it chanced that the betrothed pair were sitting side by side under the trees, while the fisherman sate near, deep in many thoughts. Seeing Father Heilmann, they sprang up and pressed round him with warm welcome. But he was sparing of speech, only begging Huldbrand to go with him into the castle. When the knight hesitated and marvelled somewhat at the grave summons, the father spoke:

"My lord of Ringstetten," quoth he, "to speak to thee in private was my desire, but why should I persist in it any longer? What I have to say concerneth equally Bertalda and the fisherman, and what must be heard at some time had better be heard forthwith. Art thou then so sure, Knight Huldbrand,

that thy first wife is dead? For myself, I cannot think so. Naught indeed will I say of the mystery that surroundeth her, for of that I know nothing certain. But that she was a faithful and God-fearing wife, of that at least there is no doubt. Now, for the last fortnight she hath stood in dreams at my bedside, wringing her hands in anguish and murmuring at my ear: 'Good Father, stay him from his purpose! I am yet living. Ah! Save his life! Save his soul!' What this night vision might mean passed my comprehension, until thy messenger came for me. Then I hurried hither with all imaginable speed—not to unite, but to separate, those who must on no account be joined. Leave her, Huldbrand! Leave him, Bertalda! For he belongs still to another. Dost thou not see how pale his cheek is through grief for his lost wife? He hath no bridegroom's air, and a voice telleth me that, an thou leave him not, thou wilt never be happy."

Now Father Heilmann spoke the truth, and the three listeners knew it in their innermost hearts; yet would they not believe it. Even the old fisherman was under a spell, for he thought that the issue must needs be what they had settled in their recent discussions. So they all set their wild and reckless haste against the priest's warnings in such sort that the holy father must perforce leave the castle with a sad heart. So little indeed was it in his heart to stay that he might not accept even a night's shelter, or take the

refreshment offered to him. As for Huldbrand, he told himself that the priest was naught but a dreamer; and with the dawn of the following day he sent for a father from the nearest monastery, who, without hesitation, promised to perform the marriage ceremony in a few days.

THE KNIGHT'S DREAM

It was between night and the dawn of day that a vision came to Huldbrand as he lay on his bed, half waking and half sleeping. Whensoe'er he composed himself to full slumber, lo, a terror crept over him and scared away his rest, so fearful were the spectres that haunted him. Yet, if he tried to rouse himself in good earnest, behold, swans' wings seemed to fan his head, and waters softly murmured at his ear, until he sank back again into half-conscious dreaminess and delusion. At length deep sleep must have overcome him, for it seemed as though he were borne on the

wings of many swans far over land and sea, they ever singing most sweetly the while.

"The music of the swan! the music of the swan!" so the words rang in his brain—"doth it not ever presage death?" But it would seem that it had another meaning. He appeared to be floating over the Mediterranean, and a swan was singing in his ear: "This is the Mediterranean Sea." And whilst he gazed down upon the waters below, lo, they became as clear as crystal so that he might see to the depths. Full pleased was he, for he could see Undine sitting beneath the crystal vault. Tears, it is true, were in her eyes, and much sadder was her look than in the happy days when first they had lived in Castle Ringstetten, and afterwards too, just before the ill-starred voyage on the Danube. And the knight must needs ponder these things in his mind very deeply and intently. Undine, it would appear, did not perceive him. But he saw Kühleborn come up to her with intent to reprove her for her tears. Whereat she drew herself up, and faced him with such dignity that he almost shrank back before her look.

"I know full well," quoth she, "that beneath the waters is my home; but my soul is still mine, and therefore I may well weep, albeit that thou canst not know what such tears mean. They, too, are blessed, as all is blessed to one who hath a true soul."

He shook his head, for he believed her not; then, bethinking himself of somewhat, he spoke:

He could see Undine beneath the crystal vault

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"Nathless, the laws of our element hold thee bound, my niece; an he marrieth again and break his troth, thou must needs take away his life."

"A widower he is," saith Undine, "to this very hour, and his sad heart holdeth me dear."

"Nay, but at the same time he hath already exchanged vows with another;" and Kühleborn laughed right scornfully. "Wait but a day or two, and the priest will have given his blessing on the pair, and then—it is thy duty to go up to earth and give death to the twice-wedded!"

"That may not be;" and Undine laughed in her turn, "for with my own hands have I sealed up the fountain against myself and my race."

"Ah, but what if he leave his castle," said Kühleborn, "or have the fountain opened? He thinketh but little of such things."

"'Tis for this very reason," Undine replied, smiling through her tears, "that he is now hovering in spirit over the Mediterranean, and is hearing this talk of ours, in a warning and bodeful dream. With manifest intent have I arranged it all."

Then Kühleborn looked up at the knight; muttering threats and stamping his feet in furious rage, he shot like an arrow beneath the waters. And so wild was his anger that he seemed to swell and grow to the size of some huge whale. And now again did the swans commence their song, flapping their wings for flight; and the knight soared, or so it appeared to

him, over mountains and streams till once more he was in the Castle Ringstetten and awoke on his bed.

In truth 'twas on his bed that he opened his eyes, and his servant, coming in, told him that Father Heilmann still lingered in the neighbourhood. He had found him, said he, the evening before in a hut which he had built for himself of branches and covered with moss and brushwood. When the priest was asked what he did there, since he refused to give the marriage-blessing, the answer came in strange fashion:

"There are other blessings," said he, "than those at the marriage-altar. I go not to the bridals; but mayhap, at some other rite I shall be present. For all things alike must we hold ourselves prepared. Marrying and mourning are not so diverse—as all may see who do not wilfully shut their eyes."

Now words like these and his strange dream gave the knight much reason for anxious thought. But it is not an easy thing, God wot, to break off a matter that a man hath once regarded as certain. And so all remained as before.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW THE KNIGHT HULDBRAND IS MARRIED

THE story now telleth of the marriage feast at Castle Ringstetten, how it was held and what cheer they had who were present thereat. Bethink thee of a multitude of bright and pleasant things heaped together, and over them all a veil of mourning spread. Would not the gloom of the covering make mockery of all their brilliance? Would it be happiness, think you, on which you looked? Would it not rather suggest the nothingness of all human joys? Now it is true that no ghostly visitants disturbed the festal company, for the castle, as we well know, had been made safe

against the mischief of angry water-sprites. But that of which the knight was ware, ay, and the fisherman, too, and all the guests, was that the chief person of the feast was absent, and that the chief person could be none other than the gentle and much loved Undine. If so be that a door opened, all eyes turned, willy-nilly, in that direction; and if it were but the steward with new dishes, or the cellarer with a flask of still richer wine, each would look down sadly, and the few flashes of wit and merriment which had passed to and fro would be quenched in sad memories. Not but what the bride was happy enough, just because she was less troubled by thought; yet ever to her, I ween, it seemed passing strange that she should be sitting at the head of the table, with green wreath and gold embroidered gown, while Undine lay a corpse, cold and stiff, at the bottom of the Danube, or else was driven far by the current into the mighty ocean. Her father had spoken some such words as these, and ever since they had rung in her ears. To-day, above all, 'twas little likely that they would be forgotten.

Early enough in the evening the company went their ways, sadly and gloomily. It was not the impatience of the bridegroom which dismissed them, but their own joyless mood and their forebodings of evil. Bertalda retired with her women, the knight with his attendants; but the wedding was too sad for the usual gay escort of bridesmaids and bridegroom's men.

Now Bertalda was all for more cheerful thoughts;

therefore had she ordered the magnificent jewels which Huldbrand had given her, together with rich apparel and veils, to be spread out before her, that she might choose from them the brightest and most beautiful for next morning's attire. Her waiting-women were not slow to wish their mistress well; in flattering words they vaunted high the beauty of the bride, and added praise to praise, until at length Bertalda looked at a mirror and sighed.

"See ye not," she said, "the freckles which disfigure my throat?" They looked and saw that it was even as their mistress had said—only they called them beauty-spots, mere tiny blemishes, which set off the exceeding whiteness of her skin. But Bertalda shook her head. "A defect is a defect," quoth she. "And I could remove them," she sighed, "only the fountain is closed whence comes the precious water with its purifying power. Oh! if I had but a flask of it to-day!"

Thereupon one of the waiting-women laughed. "Is that all?" she said, as she slipped out of the room.

"Surely," said Bertalda, at once surprised and well pleased, "she will not be so mad as to have the stone removed from the fountain this very evening?" Full soon they listened and heard how men were crossing the castle yard, and they could espy from the window the waiting-woman busying herself with her task, and leading straight to the fountain men who carried levers and other tools on their shoulders. And Bertalda smiled.

"Well-pleased am I," saith she, "if only the work taketh not too long." She was happy in that now a mere look from her could effect what had long since been so irritatingly denied, and she had no eyes save for the progress of the work in the moonlit castle yard.

It was no light task, be sure, to raise the enormous stone, and now and again one of the men would sigh as he remembered that he was undoing the work of his beloved first mistress. Nathless, the labour was not so severe as they had imagined. It seemed as if some power within the fountain were aiding them to raise the stone. The workmen stared at each other and marvelled. "Why," said they, "it is all one as though the water within had become a springing fountain!" And indeed the stone rose higher and higher, and, almost by itself, it rolled slowly down upon the pavement, making a hollow sound. Forthwith from the fountain's mouth there rose as it were a white column of water, and at first they were minded to think that it had in truth become a springing fountain; but afterwards they perceived that it was a pale woman's figure which rose, all veiled in white. It was weeping bitter tears, and wringing its hands distractedly, as it paced with slow and solemn steps to the castle building. Swiftly the servants fled from the spring; pale and stiff with horror, the bride with her attendants watched the scene from her window. And now the figure had come close below her room, and as it looked up at her

with choked sobs, Bertalda thought she recognised beneath the veil the white face of Undine. But on paced the weeping figure, slow and sad and reluctant, as though passing to a place of judgment. Bertalda shrieked out to her women to call the knight, but none of them dared to move; and even the bride herself was struck with silence, as though scared at the sound of her own voice.

Motionless, like statues, they stood at the window; and the wanderer from another world reached the castle and passed up the familiar stairs and through the well-known halls, still with silent tears. Alas! 'twas with a different step that once she had wandered there!

Now Huldbrand had dismissed his men, and stood, half-dressed, before a mirror, revolving bitter thoughts; a torch burnt dimly at his side. Of a sudden there was a light tap at the door—just so light a tap was Undine wont to give in merry sport.

"Nay, 'tis but my fancy," said the knight to himself, "I must to my wedding chamber."

"Ay, ay," said a tearful voice without, "thou must indeed, but the bed is cold!" Thereupon he saw in the mirror how the door opened slowly, slowly, and a white figure entered and carefully shut the door after her.

"They have opened the fountain," and her voice was soft and low. "And now I am here and thou must die." Straightway in his beating heart he knew

full well that it must be so; but he covered his face with his hands.

"Make me not mad with terror," he whispered, "in my hour of death. If thou hidest a hideous face behind that veil, raise it not. Take my life, but let me not see thy face!"

The white figure made answer. "I am as fair as when thou didst woo me on the promontory. Wilt thou not look upon me once more?"

"Ah," sighed Huldbrand, "if only it might be so! and I might die by a kiss from thy lips!"

"Right glad am I, my beloved!" saith she; she threw back her veil and her face smiled forth, divinely beautiful. And, trembling with love and with the nearness of death, the knight bent towards her, and she kissed him with a holy kiss. But she did not again draw back, she pressed him to her ever closer and closer, and wept as if she would weep away her soul. Tears rushed into Huldbrand's eyes, and his breast surged and heaved, till, at the last, breath failed him, and he fell back softly from Undine's arms upon the pillows of his couch—dead.

"My tears have been his death," she said to some servants who met her in the ante-chamber. This is all she spake, and passing them by as they stared on her with terror, she went slowly out towards the fountain.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW THE KNIGHT HULDBRAND WAS BURIED

Now the story draweth to a close. As soon as the news of the lord of Ringstetten's death had been noised about the district, Father Heilmann returned to the castle; and it so chanced that his arrival timed with the speedy departure of the monk who had married the unhappy pair. The latter had, indeed, fled from the gates with some haste, for he was overwhelmed with fear and horror.

"It is well;" said Heilmann, when he was informed of this, "now my duties begin, and I need no associate." Thereupon, it was his first task to bring consolation to the widowed bride—albeit that little enough could his words avail for so worldly and so thoughtless a spirit. The old fisherman, on the contrary, he found

deeply grieved, it is true, but far more resigned to the fate that had befallen his daughter and son-in-law; for, while Bertalda did not scruple to charge Undine with sorcery and murder, the old man was in far better case.

"It could be no other than it is," he said calmly; "I see in this naught but the judgment of God; nor hath any heart been more deeply riven by Huldbrand's death than that of her who was the cause—the poor, forsaken Undine!'

And now the funeral rites had to be arranged, such as might befit the rank of the dead lord. In the village churchyard, filled with the graves of his grandsires—the church itself having been endowed with many fair privileges and gifts by his ancestors and himself—Knight Huldbrand was to find burial. Already his shield and helmet lay on the coffin, to be lowered with it into the grave, for Sir Huldbrand of Ringstetten, you must know, was the last of his race; the mourners began their sorrowful march, singing requiems for the dead, under the calm blue canopy of heaven. Father Heilmann walked in advance, bearing a crucifix; last came the disconsolate Bertalda, supported by her old father. Of a sudden, among the black-robed attendants in the widows' train, lo, there was seen a snow-white figure, closely veiled, and wringing her hands in the deepest grief. Those near whom she walked were seized with terror and retreated either backward or to one side, and thus the alarm spread itself to others to whom the white stranger was now nearest, and it

went hard with them to avoid a panic. Indeed, some of the soldiers, escorting the dead, ventured to address themselves to the figure, and were all for removing it from the procession. But it seemed to vanish from their hands, and yet the next moment it was seen again walking with slow and solemn step in the melancholy cortège. At the last, inasmuch as the company was for ever moving to the right or the left, it came close behind Bertalda, and walked so slow and quiet that the widow saw it not, and it was left undisturbed.

So at length they came to the churchyard, and round the open grave the procession formed a circle. Then it was that Bertalda saw her unbidden companion, and starting up, half in anger and half in fear, bade her leave the knight's last resting-place. But the veiled figure did not move. She gently shook her head, and raised her hands as if in humble entreaty to Bertalda, who, on her part, could not choose but think with how gentle a grace Undine had held out to her the coral necklace on the Danube. Then Father Heilmann made a sign and commanded silence so that all might pray with mute supplication over the body which was now being committed to the earth. Bertalda knelt in silence; and there was not a soul that knelt not; even the grave-diggers bending themselves on their knees, when their task was done. And when they rose again, the white stranger had vanished.

But, lo! a miracle; for on the spot where she had

knelt there gushed out of the turf a little silver spring. It rippled on till it had all but encircled the knight's grave; then it ran further and fell into a lake which lay by the side of the burial-place. And even to this day the villagers show the spring, and cherish the firm belief that it is poor, rejected Undine herself, who thus holds in fast embrace her husband with her loving arms.

Thus endeth the story of Undine and of the Knight Huldbrand.

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